III

PH. D. EXAMINATION

IN

BENGALI LITERATURE.

THESIS:- "Changes In The Status Of Women During The Nineteenth Century As Reflected In Bengali Literature."

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CHANGES IN THE STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AS REFLECTED IN BENGALI LITERATURE.

PREFACE.

It has long been the fashion among Western people to speak of the "unchanging East;" but whatever truth there may once have been in the expression, it is far from being appropriate now. To-day there are many oriental races to whom it would be absurd to apply such a description. In particular, to speak at the present time of the thought, the habits and the outlook of the people of Bengal as "unchanging" would be a ludicrous misrepresentation. The changes which have taken place in that land during the last hundred years or so, have been so great and so remarkable that a visitor from the West, whose conceptions of the social condition of Bengal had been based upon the records of European travellers in the early years of the nineteenth century, would find himself bewildered by the transformation which has taken place in the meantime. A patriotic Bengali of the early twentieth

century finds it very difficult to believe that only a hundred years ago many of his forefathers not only condoned in theory, but actually practised social customs, the mere thought of which would horrify the present gereration. It is painful to relate that society was then so degraded and debased that even the great reformer Ram-mohan Ray had first-hand acquaintance in his own experience and that of his family with the evils of child marriage and polygamy and compulsory widow burning.

In the early years of the nineteenth century Bengali Hindu women were practically regarded as chattels. Even if it can be proved, as some maintain, that in primitive times Hindu women enjoyed great liberty and were highly educated, still it has to be admitted that Bengali women at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had practically no freedom and no education. The principal disabilities under which they laboured were (1) the Treatment of Widows, (2) Polygamy, (3) Child Marriage, (4) the Purda System, and (5) Lack of Education.

(1) Of these five evils, the most pathetic was the treatment Bengali Hindu women received after they had lost

their husbands. Society punished the unfortunate widow in two ways. The first and the most terrible was that whenever a man died his widow was expected to prove herself devoted to him and capable of attaining heaven, by burning herself alive on his funeral pyre. This barbarous custom was declared illegal in 1829 under the government of Lord William Bentinck, despite the vehement opposition of large numbers of the educated class.

Widows belonging to respectable Hindu families, who did not prove equal to this terrible ordeal, had to suffer life-long widowhood. And as society, at one and the same time, sanctioned polygamy and child marriage and forbade the marriage of widows, a polygamous man, at his death, used to bequeath as a legacy, to all his wives, the tortures of eternal widowhood. Once a widow always a widow -- was the rule of Hinduism, which set up as the widow's ideal the austerities of Brahmacarya, regardless of the fact that under the prevailing system babies in arms might be, and often were, left widows.

Since the passing of the Act of 1856, which sanctioned the remarriage of Hindu widows, a movement favouring their remarriage has been set on foot amongst the higher Hindu castes in Bengal. And though much moral courage and high social position are still required if one is to marry a widowed girl, she is at any rate

technically given the freedom to marry, and the hardship of her life is being gradually softened. Homes have been established with a view to educate widows and to make them economically independent.

(2). One of the chief causes of the polygamy which was prevalent in the early nineteenth century is to be found in the institution of Kulinism. Certain families were called Kulins and had higher social status than those known as non-Kulins. Again among the Kulins also there was a gradation of ranks. The custom was that a girl could not marry into a family of inferior rank, though boys were permitted to do so. As polygamy was prevalent and the choice of a bridegroom was greatly restricted by Kulinism, a Kulin boy generally had a number of wives, while many Kulin girls had to live unmarried. Amongst Kulin Brahmans, cases were not rare of a baby boy being married to an old woman, or of an infant girl becoming the wife of a decrepit old man. Some husbands never saw their wives except on the wedding-day. As a result adultery was not uncommon amongst Kulin families. Nowadays Kulinism is slackening its hold on Hindu society; and polygamy, which was quite common in the early nineteenth century, is now practically a thing of the past. For, though no legal

enactment has been passed forbidding polygamy the severity of public censure serves the purpose of a law.

(3). In the beginning of the nineteenth century Hindu girls, as a rule, were given in marriage at a very early age, the only exception being in the case of Kulin Brāhman girls. Adult marriage was regarded as sin. The Hindu law-giver Manu sanctioned the twelfth year as the highest age for a girl to marry. And seldom did any girl remain unmarried after that age, as Hindu parents were compelled by social pressure to marry their girls before puberty. But though there was thus a more or less definitely fixed maximum age for marriage there was no fixed minimum age. There was even a custom amongst the Vaidik Brāhmans that before children were born the parents arranged for their marriages.

But nowadays not only has the above marriage custom of the Vaidik Brāhmans become long obsolete, but marriages amongst the higher caste girls, do not generally take place till they have attained puberty, though the parents sometimes declare their daughters' age as lower than it is, in order to pretend that they are within the limit of the age prescribed by the Śāstras. Amongst the other castes too there is a gradual upward tendency

as regards the marriageable age of girls. Further Brāhmo girls, and girls belonging to the more progressive Hindu families are allowed considerable freedom of choice as regards marriage, a state of things previously quite unknown in Bengali Hindu society. We also find cases of women who remain unmarried.

(4). At the beginning of last century all women householders in Bengal were under a system of seclusion, generally known as that of the "pardā." Under this system women in towns practically never came out of their houses. Bengali women, both in towns and in villages, also observed another kind of seclusion, that of the "ghomṭā." The ghomṭā is that part of a "śāṛī," which a woman wears in such a fashion as to draw it over her face to cover it in public. Not long ago women who disregarded these rules were counted as women of no character.

But to-day a great change has taken place. About fifty years ago the Brāhmo women freed themselves from such restrictions. Every year that passes sees more and more denunciations of the pardā system in the public press and an increasing emancipation of Indian women. Considerable numbers of them now attend public meetings though they generally on such occasions pull the ghomṭā well down over the face. Progress is slow. "But the growing interest displayed by upper and middle class Indian

ladies in political and social questions, their increasing prominence on the platform and in the press & their zeal in the cause of temperance, infant welfare and philanthropic activities must be taken as the dawn of a new era."[1]

(5). At the beginning of the nineteenth century literacy was confined to the women of a very few aristocratic houses and there was not a single girls' school open to the public. It was in 1817 that the first primary school for girls was started in Calcutta; and after the slow but steady progress of nearly a century, in the report of the census of 1911 we get surprising statistics of Brāhmo women, almost all of whom are literate; and amongst the caste Hindus no less than thirty-five per cent of the Vaidya women can read and write; while amongst other castes, such as, Subarṇa Banik, Kāyastha and Brāhman, there is a respectable and increasing prcentage of literate women. And this inspite of the fact that education in Bengal is not yet either free or compulsory.

All the changes mentioned above are the fruit of what may be called the Renaissance in modern Bengal. One of the chief

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1. MMI. p. 222.

causes, - and in the opinion of the writer of this thesis the chief cause of this Renaissance, - was the impact of Western Civilization. This impact was brought about in various ways. It came firstly through the establishment of the centralised government of the East India Company, and secondly through the introduction by Carey and other missionaries of the Christian religion in its Protestant form. Carey, Marshman and Ward settled at Serampore in 1800. They were responsible for the introduction of Bengali printing,[1] and they started the first newspaper in Bengali.[2] They were also in a way responsible for the establishment of Bengali prose as a literary medium,[3] and for the development of education on Western lines,[4] which imparted the spirit of intellectual freedom and led to the development of scientific enquiry.

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1. (a) HBL. pp. 847. The first work in which Bengali character were printed was Halhed's "Grammar of the Bengal Language." Produced at Hugli in 1778.
   (b) In 1801 Rām-rām Basu's "Pratāpāditya Carit" was published from the Serampore press. This may be regarded as the first prose work printed in Bengali apart from certain laws and the Bengali version of some Christian tracts. CMW. p. 160
2. In 1818 the Serampore missionaries started the Samāchār Darpan -- "the first newspaper ever printed in any Oriental language." WC. p. 276.
3. BPS. pp. 67-94.
4. In this connection we must not forget the work of David Hare, Rām-mohan Rāy, Rādhā-kānta Deb and their fellow workers.

We call this change a Renaissance, firstly, because a striking parallel may be drawn between this and the great European Renaissance. Secondly, because it is a genuine rebirth of Bengali thought. It is true that when the first influence of Western thought made itself felt in Bengal it had a somewhat stunning and paralysing effect on society - in all departments we find pale, lifeless imitations of English models. But soon people began to see more clearly the true relation of the new knowledge to the life and thought of India, with the result that they went back to the wells of their own national life for fresh inspiration.

In the present thesis it is our intention to describe as accurately as possible the gradual emancipation of Hindu women in Bengal as reflected in Bengali literature. The literature dealt with is of two kinds; (a) Those works which deal directly with the position of Bengali women in our period; and (b) those which make only incidental reference to this subject. Works of the former class often tend to present a distorted and biassed view of society, and have all the defects and excesses of propagandist literature. But the second and in some ways, the more important class of books consists of novels and short stories dealing descriptively and incidentally with social conditions and therefore providing much more valuable and reliable information than can be found in the frankly partisan literature of social reformers or the effusions of their conservative opponents.[1]

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1. The thesis takes account only of works published during the nineteenth century, but a short section has been appended dealing with some of the women novelists of the present century, who have attempted to describe the social evils of the nineteenth century.

Abbreviations Used In The Thesis.

AC Ātma-carit by Śiva-nāth Śāstrī. (2nd Edition)

BH Brāhmanism and Hinduism (1887) by Sir M.M.Williams.

BC Baṅkim-candra by Akṣaya-kumār Datta Gupta.

BDP Brāhmikādiger Prati Upadeś by Keśab-candra Sen. (Part I, - 2nd Edition. Part II, - 1802 Edition)

BP Bibidha Prabandha by Bhudeb-candra Mukherji. (Book II, -1st Edition.)

BPS Bengali Prose Style (1921) by Dīneś-candra Sen.

CG Chota Galpa (1894) by Rabīndra-nāth Tagore.

CMW The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward (1857) by John Clark Marshman.

CUC Report of the Calcutta University Commission (1917-19) (Part I -- Chap. XIV.)

DNT Maharṣī Debendra-nāth Thakur by Ajit-kumār Chakrabarttī.

DNTh Śrīmanmaharṣī Debendra-nāth Thākur by Īsān-candra Basu.

EI Progress of Education in India (1912-17) (Vol. II. -- Government Publication.)

HI - Oxford Students' History of India by V. A. Smith.

HBL History of Bengali Language and Literature (1911) by Dīneś-candra Sen.

KC Kathā Catuṣṭay (1894) by Rabīndra-nāth Tagore.

KS Korān Śariph (Girīś-candra Sen Edition)

LB The Literature of Bengal (1895) by Rameś-candra Datta.

LD The Life of Alexander Duff (1879) by George Smith.

MA Missionary Addresses before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in the years 1835, 1837, 1839. by Alexander Duff.

MME The complete works of the Swāmī Vivekānanda (Māyāvatī Memorial Edition.)

~~MMI~~ ~~Statement Exhibiting~~

MMI Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India in 1921. (Government Publicati

MSD Māikel Madhusudan Datter jīban-carit by Yogīndra-nāth Basu.

Pat. Patrabalī. by Vivekānanda Svamī.
Part I. 4th Edition.
Part II. 2nd Edition.
Part III. 1st Edition.

POP Prāchya O Paścātya by Vivekānanda Svamī. (4th Edition)

RB Rām-mohan Rāy's Bengali Works (Bengali Era 1312)

RD Recollections of Alexander Duff (1879) by Lal-behari De.

RM Mahatmā Rājā Rām-mohan Rāy by Nagendra-nāth Chatterji.

RL Rāmtanu Lāhiṛī by Śiva-nāth śāstrī.
(Sir Roper Lethbridge 1907 Edition)

RRE The English Works of Rājā Rām-mohan Rāy (1906)

RKHLC A Review of the Progress of Knowledge of Hindu Law and Custom (1885) by R. Raghu-nāth Rāo.

SA Sekāl Ār Ekāl by Rājnārāyan Basu. (Saka Era 1796)

SP Sāmājik Prabandha by Bhudeb-chandra Mukherji.
(Bengali Era 1299)

SSS Svāmi Śiṣya Sambad. by Śarat-chandra Chatterji.
(Purbba Khanda)

SWS Speeches and Writings of Svāmī Vivekānanda.
(5th Edition. G.A.Natesan &Co., Madras.)

Sj. Samāj (1918) by Rabīndra-nāth Tagore. (2nd Edition)

BBh Barttaman Bhārat by Svāmī Vivekānanda. (3rd Edition)

WC The Life of William Carey (1885) by George Smith.

WI The Women of India and What Can Be Done for Them (1895)
(The Christian Literature Society, Madras)

WIL The Web of Indian Life (1918) by Sister Nivedita.

WP Woman's Place in Hindu Religion by Svāmī Abhedānanda (4th Edition)

WSR Woman Under Different Social and Religious Laws by Saik M.H.Kidwai.

YYD Yurop Yātrīr Dāyārī (1891) by Rabīndra-nāth Tagore. (Introduction. Part I.)

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(2) A short sketch of Hem-candra Banerji.- Hem-candra on the sufferings of Bengali widows.- (3) A short sketch of Bankim-candra Chatterji.- Widow remarriage in Bankim-candra's novel "Bisrksa",-Views of a partisan.- Lack of sympathy with widow remarriage.- Young widow's supposed views on her own condition.- Some support reform to please English patrons.- Rigidity of rules about widows food and dress relaxed.- Bankim-candra's own views on widow remarriage.- He leaves it to individual conscience.- (4) A short sketch of Bhudeb-candra Mukherji.- His opposition to widow remarriage based on climate.- He supports his statement from statistics of (i) different Indian communities, (ii) comparison with the countries of Southern and Northern Europe.- (5) A short sketch of Ramés-candra Datta.- His social novels "Samsar" and "Samaj".- The heroine Sudha becomes a widow at seven.- Her hand sought by a young reformer Sarat.- This creates a great scandal.- The illiterate maid-servant astounded at such a disgraceful proposal.- The half-educated and conservative wife of Debi Babu doubted the respectability of bride and bridegroom.-

A village pundit maintains that the introducer of widow remarriage, Vidyāsāgar, must be an immitator of "despicable foreigners." - But Sudhā's sister Bindu could not concsive that God or the Scriptures could condemn little widows to life-long suffering.- Bindu's husband Hem-candra promised Śarat his support but warned him of the probable effects of the marriage.- Śarat's love for Sudhā and enthusiasmafor reformation justified his cause.- His mother wants her son to be happy but is afraid of "social curse".- His Guru-Deva believes that compulsory widowhood is against God's intention.- After marriage Śarat and Sudhā boycotted by village society.- The Brāhmans insist on Śarat's doing penance which he refuses.- But his mother gives them a feast and patches up a temporary settlement.- but it breaks down and society declares such widow remarriage adultery.- (b) A short sketch of Śiva-nāth Śastrī.- Effects of Vidyāsāgar's book on widow remarriage in Śiva-nāt's novel "Yugāntar."- (i) It bewildered Hindu thought. (ii) The author despised as an atheist by the left wing of the orthodox section.- (iii) The right wing praise him but prefer time-honoured Brahmacarya for their widows. - Bijoyā, a

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(1) Rām-mohan Rāy's writings suggest three main social factors which encouraged Polygamy.- Rām-mohan on sufferings of Kulīn wives.- He was the first Bengali to oppose the custom.- He maintains that it is contrary to Hindu Law.- Following the Śāstras he suggests eleven distinct circumstances under which a man may be permitted to marry a second wife.- He suggests to the government to see that this rule is respected by the people.- (2) Īsvar-candra Gupta's observation on the practice of Kulīn polygamy.- (3) Dīna-bandhu Mitra.- His description of a Kulīn's character.- (4) Hem-candra Banerji on the marriage ideal of Kulīn girls.- In his poem "Kulīn Mahilā-Bilap" he maintains that Polygamy is a very wicked custom,"kept up by cannibals".- It treats little girls as well as old women abominably.- The poet passionately appeals to Queen Victoria to remedy this custom by Law.- Bankim-candra Chatterji's arguments against Vidyāsāgar's theory that Polygamy.-

is contrary to Hindu Law.- Bankim-candra admits that the gradual disappearance of Polygamy is due to impact of European Culture.- But in his novels we do not always find unqualified condemnation of Polygamy.- "Bisbrkha" is a pathetic tale about the ruination of a family through Polygamy.- The hero Nagendra's arguments in favour of Polygamy.-He admits that Monogamy is only a borrowed custom from the English.- In "Rajani" Bankim-candra portrays the miserable conditions of "satins".- Jealousy of "satins" in "Sitaram Ray".- The two "satins" Sagar and Nayan in "Debi Cau dhurani".- But an extraordinary personality like Praphulla can make "satins" happy.- Bankim-candra's conception of the high philosophy of"satin"-hood as illustrated in the life of Praphulla.- (6) In Ramesh-candra Datta's novel "Samaj" old Tarini Babu marries a little girl when his first wife becomes old and their only child dies.- Social leaders and Brahman pandits support the marriage.- The new wife's brother sanctions it for worldly advantage.- Only the

Section III.--"Bāla Bibāha" or Child Marriage.

Introduction.- Child marriage in the (1) Vedas, (2) the Epics, (3) the Smṛtis and (4) popular fiction.- Attempt to abolish child marriage and the teachings of Christian missionaries and Derozio.- Keśab-candra Sen and the Marriage Act of 1882.- Its real effects.- Age of Consent Act of 1891.- Opposition to the measure.- Modern attitude to child marriage.- Reasons of comparatively late marriages of girls of present day.-89- 98

(1) Īśvar-candra Gupta mentions cases amongst the Kulīns in which babies-in-arms are married to old maids.- (2) Dīnabandhu Mitra on Kulīn old maids.- (3) Throughout his novels Bankim-candra shows that in normal cases Hindu girls are given in marriage before their twelfth year.- But Rajanī was unmarried even at seventeen because she was poor and blind.- Kunda was not married at thirteen, as she was

the only support of her old father.- Rādhārāṇí was married late because her guardian had modern ideas.- In Rameś-candra Datta's "Saṁsār" we find Kālītārā is married in her eighth, Bindu in her nineth and Sudhā in her fifth year.- The author suggests that owing to economic and social difficulties people are forced to marry comparatively late.-Regarding Gopabālā's marriage the Brāhman pandits hold that child marriage is a Śāstric affair.- (5) Śiva-nāth Śastrī's explanation of "Kula-Samvandha." - He says that according to custom girls are married before ten, but he recommends adult marriage.- (6) Bhudeb-candra Mukherji is a blind supporter of the system of child marriage.- He maintains that twelfth or thirteenth year has been and should always be the marriageable age of a Bengali girl.- He believes that child marriage is the result of joint family system, a system which must persist as India is an agricultural country.- He advocates child marriage also for the sake of the national life.- He maintains that the system is a necessary outcome of a hot country like India.-He supports his statement from statistics.-

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nath suggests that Calcutta "maidan" should be used by the pardā-nāsins for health's sake.- (7) A short sketch of Keśab-candra Sen.- He organises aa spiritual sisterhood.- His plea for the freedom of of women.- The bondage of pardā makes man's heart harder and that of woman;s narrower.- (8) Śiva-nāth Śāstrī holds more advanced views than Keśab-candra as regards the abolition of the parda system. In his novel "Meja Bau" we get a clear picture of the parda system as it exists in Hindu middle class society in Bengal.- The pardā-nāsin does not greet her husband before other people.- Nor does she dine with male relations.- She, as a rule, observes her "ghomṭā" in front of her parents-in-law.- But she observes no such rule before her husband's younger brothers and their friends.- She goes out in closed carriage for sightseeing.- A relaxation of the parda system has already begun as a result of economic pressure and influence of missionary

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is making Bengali girls Anglicised.-(3) Hem-candra Banerji appreciates the new educational system.- (4) Bankim-candra Chatterji advocates the education of women because they form half of humanity.- In his novels we find that the majority of the advocates of female education do not prefer Westernised University learning, though they appoint English teachers for their girls.- These people also understand the importance of deferring the marriage age of their girls in order that they may be educated.- In "Bisbrksa" we find Nagendra starting a school under the influence of his wife Suryamukhi.- Bankim-candra's own views on female education.- He would have Bengali women get a training moral, physical and intellectual, like Praphulla who is his ideal woman.- (5) In Rames-candra Datta's "Sansar" we find what the majority of Hindus meant by a girl's education about 1885.- It is only to scribble letters and to read the Ramayana and Mahabharata.- Some girls marry even before learning alphabet.- But nine years later the same author assures us in his novel "Samaj" that society as a whole has made some progress in the

education of women.- (6) Śiva-nāth Śāstrī gives an account of the education of Bengali women about (a) 1850-1860, and (b) about 1880.- The influence of the Hindu College on female education.- An orthodox pandit's view of the education of Bengali women.- Śiva-nāth observes that at the end of last century some Bengali women got a decent education on Western lines without being Anglicised.- And some fathers made no difference between boys and girls in regard to education.- (7) Rabīndra-nāth maintains that a woman requires the education of her mind for the fulfilment of her womanhood.- He refutes arguments against female education.- He urges equal education for boys and girls, as lack of English education in wives is creating a great gulf between them and their husbands.- In his "Chira-kumār Sabhā" we find a family where the girls are equal to men in education and cleverness.-(8) Svāmī Vivekānanda believes that one chief reason of India's degradation is lack of women's education. He thinks that education will fit them to improve their own

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Section 1.

TREATMENT OF WIDOWS.

A. "SATĪDĀHA" OR "CONCREMATION."[1]

INTRODUCTION.

If a visitor from Mars, after acquainting himself with the present social customs of Bengal, set out to investigate the changes in the status of women during the nineteenth century as reflected in Bengali Literature, he would be startled to find on the first page of that literature references to the inhuman custom of "Satīdāha." Certainly nothing in the Bengali society of to-day would have led him to suppose that only a century ago it was considered quite proper for a wife to immolate herself upon her husband's funeral pyre. But it was the belief of the Hindus of that time

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1. The word "Satī" means a "chaste" wife, and "dāha" means "burning"; and "Satīdāha" is the name given to the burning alive of a widow with her husband's corpse.

that a woman would attain heaven if she proved herself completely devoted to her husband in this way. The practice was an ancient one[1] and when first introduced, is said to have been voluntary. But, for reasons which have not yet been satisfactorily discovered,[2] it gradually became general in India, especially in Bengal and the Deccan, and was frequently insisted upon by social custom.

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1. Historians are not yet sure when "Satīdāha" first began to be practised in the Hindu community. Neither in the Vedas nor in Manu do we find any trace of the custom; though the Epic poets and Greek historians recorded instances of "Satīdāha" before the Christian Era.
Vide. (1) The History of India by the Hon. Mountstuart Elphinstone. pp. 50, 207, and 265.
" (2) RRE. pp. 366-372.
2. Apart from religious and sentimental grounds, it has been suggested that the origin of "Satīdāha" might be due to the legal and social injustice done to Hindu widows, or that it may be a remnant of a very ancient custom prevalent amongst the ancestors of the Indo-European races. It has also been suggested that the prevalence of the custom was perhaps the revenge of a cowardly weak community against the disgraceful treatment of their young widows by those Mussalman conquerors, Burmese plunderers, and Portuguese pirates, who had little respect for women. (HFL. pp. 975-985.) But why should these men have molested widows only?

Whatever may have been the cause of the prevalence of "Satīdāha", it cannot be denied that a society which condoned and even enjoined suicide of this nature was in a degraded state. How many women willingly sacrificed themselves at the altar of love for their dead husbands we do not know; but we are sure that innumerable cases occurred where widows were cruelly compelled by their near relations to accept this terrible fate.

The movement against "Satīdāha" was started by the Serampore missionaries. In 1801 Dr Carey declared that the state should not allow this criminal custom to go on even though it was claimed that it had the sanction of religion. Three years later the missionaries as a result of enquiries made by them obtained statistics concerning the number of "Satīdāha" victims in and around Calcutta, and their views were embodied in a government minute-- the first government record regarding "Satīdāha." This minute was submitted to Lord Wellesley. But he could not give the matter proper consideration as his term of

office was about to come to an end; and with his retirement the question lay in abeyance for thirteen years until Rām-mohan Rāy revived the agitation.[1] The noble-hearted Lord William Cavendish-Bentinck proved a great helper to the Bengali Reformer, though the governors-general who had preceeded him, had pursued a policy of non-interference with the customs of the land, good or bad. In 1823 Rādhā-Kānta Deb, the orthodox leader, proposed an amendment to an address of thanks given to Lord Hastings at his farewell meeting in Calcutta to the effect "that Lord Hastings should be particularly thanked for 'the protection and encouragement which he had afforded to the ancient and orthodox practice'."[2] This amendment was however, defeated.

Rām-mohan Rāy was the first Bengali who was deeply touched by one of the shocking scenes of "Satīdāha," and he set himself with great energy to get rid of this custom. "It was principally his vehement denunciation of this practice, and the agitation against it set on

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1. WI. p. 123.
2. Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India by the late Right Rev. Reginald Heber, D.D. Lord Bishop of Calcutta. (1844). p. 55.

foot by him which ultimately led to its abolition in 1829.[1] But Ram-mohan was at first "against direct government regulation, for he apprehended that any public enactment would give rise to general apprehension,"[2] though we do not know what alternative method he would have suggested in the circumstances. However we find that when the orthodox party, vehemently opposed the abolition of the custom he and his party supported the government.[3]

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1. BH. pp. 481-482.
2. Minute of Lord Bentinck - Bengal Crim. Jud. Cons. 4th Dec. 1829 for Ram-mohun and Suttee Regulation.
3. LB. p. 147.

"C O N C R E M A T I O N."

[Rām-mohan Rāy.

Born in 1774 of an aristocratic Vaiṣṇava Brāhman family in the Hugly district, Rām-mohan Rāy by assimilating the best thought of the East and West, became the first prophet of Modern Bengal. He was largely responsible for most of the healthy movements that came with the Renaissance, as witness (a) his starting of the Vedāntic movement in order to put a stop to sectarian antagonism; (b) his helping to introduce English education thus familiarising the youth of Bengal with the current thought of the outside world; (c) his condemnation of caste distinctions as the greatest enemy of his people, (d) his new way of reading Sanskrit literature; (e) his advocacy of Hindi as the lingua franca of India, and (f) his use of Bengali prose as a literary medium. In him Bengali women found their first champion Forty years before the publication of Mills' "Subjection of Women", he urged that boys and girls should be given equal education and equal opportunities in life. He proved from the Hindu Law Books that a deceased son's wife and son were entitled

to equal shares in his property. He was also a great opponent of polygamy, and his most practical success was achieved in his fight against "Satīdāha." He died at Bristol in 1833.]

Rām-mohan Rāy wrote three Bengali books on the prohibition of "Satīdāha." [1] In these books his main object was to prove that the Hindu Śāstras always preferred Niskam Karma[2] to Kāmya Karma,[3] and of the two practices; (1) Brahmacarya[4] and (2) Satidaha, the widow must follow the former because it is Niṣkām Karma and she must shun the second as it is Kāmya.

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1. (i) "Sahamaran Biṣay Prabarttak O Nibarttaker Sambād." It was probably published in 1818; for the author in the beginning of the second book tells us that he renews this discussion after one year. (ii) "Sahamaran Biṣaye-Prabarttak O Nibarttaker Dvitīya Sambād." - published in 1821. (iii) "Sahamaran Biṣay." - published in 1829 - the year when the custom of "Satīdāha" was prohibited by law.
2. Action without desire (of personal advantage)
3. "Any act or ceremony done from interested or selfish motives" - Sanskrit-English Dictionary by Sir Monier Monier-Williams.
4. "The state of an unmarried religious student, a state of continence." - Ibid.

In speaking about the importance of Niṣkām Karma in the Śāstras, Ram-mohan lays special stress on the Bhagavad Gītā, which he has described as the "Essence of all the Śāstras." He maintains that until Hindus disown the Gītā, they cannot take Kāmya Karma as an ideal "For, almost half of the Bhagavad Gītā is full of condemnation of Kāmya Karma, and praise of Niṣkām Karma." In order to support his statement he quotes from the Gītā 3^{9}, 5^{12}, 2^{49}, 18^{6}. Rām-mohan is sure that the pandits do understand the meaning and the ideal of the Gita, but in order to please ignorant folk, lead women along the reprehensible road of "Satīdāha," "holding out to them false hopes of Heaven."[1]

Rām-mohan's arguments against "Satīdāha" would have been greatly strengthened if he had been able boldly to advocate widow remarriage; but the day when one could speak in favour of it was yet far distant. He argued as he did, for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted to save widows from a cruel death; and secondly, he genuinely admired the voluntary renunciation of worldly pleasures by widows of all ages, who thus kept alive the memory

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1. RB. p. 185.

of their dead husbands. He drew the attention of the people of his community to the statements of Hindu Law-givers and especially Manu, recommending widows to follow the strict rules of brahmacarya.

Rām-mohan also realised that his people, however conservative they might be practically cared little about the reasonable dictates of the Śāstras. They were far more concerned with their time-honoured customs and were not prepared to have these customs changed however bad they might be, even if arguments in favour of change could be adduced from the Śāstras. He admitted that they were not naturally lacking in charity and humane feeling, but being brought up to regard "Satīdāha" as a commendable practice, their hearts were so hardened that they could not understand the gravity of the situation.[1]

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1. With the exception of Rām-mohan Bengali writers have practically made no mention of "Satīdāha". Probably they had no wish to remind themselves or their readers that not many years ago such an evil custom flourished in their country. We find one or two casual references to the practice in the writings of such social reformers as Śiva-nāth Śāstrī and Svāmī Vivekānanda but they mentioned them only to illustrate the social tyranny of the time. Vide (a) p. 52 and (b) Pat pp. 121-124.

Rām-mohan maintains that a bad custom, however ancient and deep-rooted it may be, must not be maintained. Besides he points out that the custom of "Satidāha" was nothing but an organised onslaught upon the lives of widows; and no religion could sanction murder. He condemned his country as degraded, because it allowed such a custom. He maintained that there was no real difference between the Hindu community and the savage hill-tribes who also sacrifice human beings either from greed of gold, or to satisfy their terrible gods. "A man's wickedness and gentleness," says Rām-mohan, "are ascertained by his deeds." [1]

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1. RB. p. 201.

Section 1.

TREATMENT OF WIDOWS.

B. "BIDHABĀ BIBĀHA" OR WIDOW REMARRIAGE.

INTRODUCTION.

Among highcaste Hindus the prejudice against the remarriage of widows was much stronger in the early years of last century than it is now. If even a babe-in-arms, had the misfortune to lose her husband, the unfortunate infant was condemned to life-long widowhood. According to the popular interpretation of the Doctrine of Karma, the relation of a man and his wife was permanent through eternity. His wife in his present re-birth was supposed to be identical with the wife of past lives; and this eternally inseparable relation of a wife to her husband involved a peculiar conception of the meaning of chastity. How could a widow still be a chaste woman if she took a second husband on the death of the first, since, according to the current view, the latter had not really died, but was waiting to marry her again

in their next re-birth.[1]

The life of a widow had always been hard. She was socially a dead person. She could never expect to re-marry and enjoy a husband's affection and protection again. In certain festivities it was considered unlucky for her to take part. She could not eat the ordinary food of the family. In dress and diet she was forced to lead an ascetic life -- a life of mourning and preparation to meet her dead husband in the next re-birth. In some parts of Bengal on the day of the fortnightly Ekādaśī fast she was forbidden to drink even a drop of water. An infant widow had to pass a terrible day without food and drink even in the height of the hot weather, while the elder members of the family were eating their fill before her eyes.

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1. Strange to say, this popular belief did not hold good so far as the man was concerned. He could marry as many wives as he pleased. But Hindu apologists might find support for this apparent inconsistency in the prevalence of polygamy. They might say that all the wives of a polygamous husband in this birth were his wives in all re-births.

There were men, of course, who felt deeply for their widowed sisters and daughters. But hardly any man dared oppose the leaders of society in any effort to mitigate this tyranny.[1] Strange to say, this fact had not even struck such a great man as Rām Mohan Ray.

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1. It is said that at the beginning of the sixteenth century when Hindu thought in Bengal was being influenced by Islam, and when Chaitanya was preaching his gospel of love and equality, the great pandit Raghunandan Bhattacarya of Navadvīp once tried to remove this social evil but without success. More than two hundred years later on the eve of the Battle of Plassy when European thoughts and ideas were just beginning to spread in Bengal, Rājā Rājballab Sen made a strenuous effort in the same direction, but through the jealousy of his great rival Rājā Kṛṣṇa-candra Rāy no real progress was made.

The institution of widow remarriage was not unknown during the period of the Mahābhārata. There we find Kṛṣṇa and the seer Nārada giving Mayavati permission to remarry when she became a widow after a married life of twenty years. It can, however, be alleged that she was always a virgin-wife. But the question of virginity is not mentioned in the case of the second Svayamvara of Damayantī, when owing to Nala's long absence he was thought dead.

Throughout his writings we do not find a single line against compulsory widowhood. Like other pandits of those days he always maintained that Brahmacarya was the ideal state for Hindu widows and he made no exception in the case of child-widows.[1]

The first champions of the cause of Hindu widows in general and child-widows in particular, were the Serampore Baptist missionaries at the beginning of last century. And in 1830 when Dr. Duff of the Scottish Mission

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1. It can however, be argued that the graver evil ~~like~~ of widow burning overshadowed his mind so much that a comparatively lesser evil, viz, compulsory widowhood, did not catch his eye at first. But after the abolition of Satīdāha, say some later writers including Nagendra-nāth Chatterji (RM. p. 171) and Dīna-bandhu Mitra (Suradhunī Kābya. pp. 657-658,) he understood the gravity of the situation and on the eve of his departure for England, expressed his intention of taking it up after his return, but unfortunately he died in England.

came and began his work in Calcutta, he conducted a vigorous propaganda against compulsory widowhood and infant betrothal. In his address on "Female Education in India," delivered in 1839, we may see how deeply he felt the social injustice done to Hindu widows, and specially to the widows of Kulin Brāhmans, who, when they died, used to leave behind a horde of wives of every age to suffer the evil effects of perpetual widowhood.[1] Dr Duff understood that the most effective remedy for the evil was in the hands of Hindus themselves. As Hindu orthodoxy was too strong to do anything publicly, in 1842 he formed "a secret society amongst the educated Hindus for privately instructing their young daughters and female relations" on the subject.[2]

But the first of the people of the country to try to awaken Bengal to a serious consideration of these vital matters was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, a Bengali of Portuguese extraction.

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1. MA. pp 230-237.
2. (a) LB. (1900 Edition). pp. 194-195. (b) see also p.

Derozio (1809-1831) held a unique position in his time in Bengal. After the departure of Rām-mohan Rāy and before the advent of Debendra-nāth Thākur, Derozio was undoubtedly the greatest personality amongst the Bengalis. His father sent him to Mr Drummond's school at Dharmatalā, which he left at the age of fourteen, having fully imbibed all the visionary ideas of the French Revolution which he had learned from Mr Drummond, who on account of his resolute refusal to abandon his ideas had been driven from home and settled in India. At the age of eighteen Derozio gained for himself quite a reputation as a poet. And a few months later when he joined the teaching staff of the Hindu School, he was already known as a socio-religious revolutionary, and an ardent student of Hume, Thomas Paine, Rousseau, Voltaire, and other philosophers of the same type. Himself a lover of India, a keen searcher after truth and a man of good moral character, he soon captured the hearts of the young students of the Hindu School. Most of the pioneers of the social reformation in Bengal were either directly

his students or indirectly influenced by his teachings. It has been claimed - and there is some truth in it- that it was through his inspiration that Kṛṣṇa-mohan Banerji started the "Enquirer," and Rasik-kṛṣṇa Mallik the "Jñānā-nvesaṇa," the first an English and the second a Bengali periodical. He himself edited the "Hesperus" and the "East Indian." He contributed articles to the "Indian Gazette" then edited by Dr Grant.

But his hostility to religion shocked religious people; and his advocacy amongst his Hindu students of a disregard of all orthodox restrictions, and particularly his advice to them to eat beef made the Hindus so afraid that they lodged a complaint against him which brought about his dismissal from the school. He only lived a few months after, though he still reigned supreme in the hearts of his pupils. He died at the very early age of twenty-three.

Already well-known as a very enthusiastic supporter of Rām-mohan Rāy in the Satīdāha movement, Derozio came forward as a champion of social reconstruction. He tried his

best to arouse the sympathy of many Hindus who were accustomed to look on ~~the~~ compulsory widowhood, and such other standing social customs as a matter of course.[1] It was Derozio's young pupils of the Hindu College who became the pioneers of the widow remarriage movement. They had an "Academic Association," where they discussed all the current social problems; and they published the "Bengal Spectator," to which they contributed articles on the subject of widow remarriage. They were the first to refer to the sayings of Parāsara, quoted afterwards by Pandit Īśvar-candra Vidyāsāgar, as permitting widow remarriage.[2] From the boys of the Hindu School the spirit gradually began to spread amongst public men, among whom Śrīścandra Rāy, Rāja of Kṛṣṇanagar, is worthy of mention.[2]

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1. (a) BC. p. 9
   (b) DNT. p. 29.
   (c) DNTh. p. 14.
   (d) HSD. pp. 25-28.
   (e) RD. p. 29.
   (f) Rh. pp. 64-70; 181-182.
   (g) SA. pp. 24-29.
   (h) Dictionary of Indian Biography, by C.E. Buckland. (1906) p. 117.
2. Rh. p. 115.

But it was Vidyāsāgar[1] who gave the greatest impetus to the movement. Like his predecessor Rām-mohan Rāy, he understood that it would be sheer waste of time to appeal only to the conscience of the people to put matters right. People would not pay attention to a suggestion simply because of its reasonableness. They wanted to know if it was sanctioned by their religious books, and by religious books they meant the vast ocean of Sanskrit literature with all its diversity of opinion on social problems. Vidyāsāgar clearly foresaw that the best line to take was to convince the people of the validity of widow remarriage from the Śāstras; and then to insist on the government's passing an Act in order to give a legal position to the issue of such marriages; and thirdly, to start a vigorous propaganda amongst enlightened people

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1. As a student Vidyāsāgar was indirectly influenced by Derozio; because in those days the Sanskrit college of which Vidyāsāgar was a student and the Hindu college where Derozio was a teacher, occupied the same buildings.

in support of its reasonableness on humanitarian grounds.

Thus firstly he contributed articles on the subject to the "Tattvabodhinī Patrikā." Then he issued his "Bidhabā Bibāha Grantha" or "Book on Widow Remarriage."[1] And finally when he thought that he had secured sufficient adherents to his cause, he urged his countrymen to approach the government and insist on a law being passed. As a result four petitions were submitted to the Legislative Council of India.[2] But the orthodox Hindus did not contemplate this proposed innovation silently. Under the leadership of Rādhā-kānta Deb, Rājā of Sobhā-bāzār, no less than thirty thousand people appealed to the government against Vidyāsāgar's proposals. The government took a wise view of the situation. They passed an Act -- Act XV of 1856, dated 26th July 1856 -- in order

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1. The first edition was published in 1853 and the revised and enlarged second edition was on sale two years later.
2. The signatures of the petition included such well-known names as the Mahārājās of Burdwān and Krishnagar, the Rājās of Paikpārā, Leaders of the Tagore family including Devendra-nāth Tagore, Īśvar-candra Gupta, Prasanna K Sarbādhikarī, Rāmnārāyan Basu, Mahendra-nāth Sarkār, Pyārīmohan Sarkār, Akshay K Datta, Jaykrsna Mukherji, Dwārkānāth Mitra and others.

to give a legal position to widows who remarry, and to their children with a preliminary remark that "it will leave all those Hindus who do not agree with the opinion of the Petitions precisely as they are now." The first clause of the Act is as follows:-

"No marriage contracted between Hindus shall be deemed invalid, or the issue thereof illegitimate, by reason of the woman having been previously married or betrothed to another person since deceased, any custom or interpretation of Hindu Law to the contrary notwithstanding."

A few weeks after the passing of the Act the first widow remarriage took place.[1] In order to popularise the movement in 1859 Keśab-candra Sen staged in Calcutta a Bengali drama, "Bidhabā bibāha Natak."[2] In 1997 Sasipada

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1. The bridegroom was Śrīścandra Vidyaratna, a pandit friend of Vidyāsāgar, and a high government official. It is interesting that the bridegroom had to be protected by a police escort for fear of molestation by the opponents of widow remarriage.

2. It was composed by Umeś-candra Mitra, in 1857.

Banerji established a Widows' Home at Barāhanagar. This was the first one opened in India under a Hindu organisation. It has been followed in recent times by three more -- one at Dacca in 1911, and two in Calcutta in 1910 and in 1922. This last one is called Vidyāsāgar Bāṇī Bhavan, and was established by Abalā Basu (wife of Sir Jagadīś Candra Bose), Amodinī Basu and other women leaders of society. It is an asylum not only for widows, but also for women who have been deserted by their husbands. Arrangements have been made there tot each Bengali, English, Sanskrit, mathemathics, history, geography, weaving, sewing, cookery, etc.

From 1856 down to the present day stray cases of widow remarriage, have, it is true, occurred; but very few families dare to go against the conservation of their community. Īśvar-candra Vidyāsāgar afterwards understood that neither proof texts from Sanskrit books, nor acts of the government could have much effect on these deep rooted social customs, and he had to admit his failure.

"I am crying in the wilderness;" he remarked, "my conviction was that the people of this country followed the Śāstras; but I see now that they do not care for the Śāstras, but that custom is their religion."

WIDOW REMARRIAGE.

Īsvar-candra Gupta.

The first Bengali writer to deal with the subject in any work of real literary importance was Īsvar-candra Gupta.[1] He was born near Calcutta in 1811 of a Vaidya family. He was a journalist and a poet. His literary activities covered a period of twenty-eight years, beginning with 1830 and continuing until his death in 1858. In the former year, through the help and encouragement of some members of the Tagore family, the "Gupta poet" -- the name by which he has always been known in Bengal, -- started the "Sambād Prabhākar" as a weekly paper in Calcutta. The success of the paper was so great that in 1839 he made it a daily paper. This was the first daily, ever published in any of the Indian vernaculars. He also established a number of other papers[2] most of which enjoyed

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1. We have accepted the date given by Bankim-candra Chatterji.
2. "Sādhu Ranjan" and "Sambād Ratnābalī."

only a short life. He encouraged students to write for his papers and corrected their contributions, some of these ultimately came to be numbered amongst the foremost Bengali writers, e.g. Bankim-candra Chatterji, the novelist; Hem-candra Banerji, the poet; and Dīna-bandhu Mitra, the dramatist. Isvar-candra was also the pioneer of later biography as a form of literature, and of literary clubs. He was the first to collect the works of the old Bengali poets. In his poetry we can trace in Bengali for the first time the influence of English metre. But he was more of a satirist than a real poet. Bankim-candra says that "he lacked that mental and spiritual development which the society of women gives and which comes to a man who regards women with affection and respect."[1] He was regarded as a champion of the conservative party. It is no exaggeration to say that at times he carried with him ninety-five per cent of educated Bengal. It is interesting to note that he understood the importance of the proposed reform and put his signature to one of Vidyāsāgar's petitions, though he was the editor of the

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1. Īsvar-candra Gupta's "Kavitā Sangraha" - (Bankim-candra Chatterji Edition - Bengali Era 1292) pp. 19-20.

orthodox organ "Prabhākar."]

In his poem "Bidhabā Bibāha" Īśvar-candra depicts society on the eve of the passing of the Widow Remarriage Act. He tells us that society as a whole understood the injustice of condemning children to compulsory widowhood; but that the conservative section opposed the bill on the ground that as soon as it was passed older widows might take advantage of it.[1]

The orthodox movement, however, was not successful and the Widow Remarriage Act was passed. The orthodox people naturally could not bear this innovation calmly, and their views are well-expressed in Īśvar-candra's poem "Bidhaba Bibaha Ain" or "The Widow Remarriage Act." There the poet tells us the reasons why the orthodox people think that the government ought not to have passed the Act. Firstly, the custom of remarriage of Hindu widows was an innovation; secondly, the government took into

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1. Īśvar-candra Gupter Granthābalī (Kālī-prasanna Vidyāratna Edition). p. 50.

took into consideration the question of consummation (which was the basis of the Śāstric sanction of widow remarriage). Thirdly, why should a foreign government interfere in religious matters which were entirely a question for Hindu society to decide. Fourthly, the government practically forced through the law before the people who were directly concerned, had judged the question for themselves. And lastly if the people sincerely wanted to effect a reform, they ^ made no need to bother with the state.[1]

The poet is doubtful if widow remarriage could be made popular in Hindu Bengal. The reformer Vidyasagar might do his best, might induce government to enact a law, but his influence was hardly felt beyond his own circle. "If the 'Sāgar'[2] oversteps its own boundary," says the poet

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2. "Sāgar" literally means "Ocean". The poet compares "Vidyā-Sāgar" with "Sāgar" or "Ocean". "Vidyā" means "learning". "Vidyāsāgar" literally means "Ocean of Learning". It was a Sanskrit degree akin to the English Doctor of Literature.

1. Īśvar-candra Gupter Granthāvali (Kali-prasanna Vidyāratna Edition) p. 48-49.

"perhaps widow remarriage may become popular."

In his poem "Barṣā Bidāy" or "Farewell to the Old Year",[1] the poet pretends to fear that the "Home Government" might annul the Widow Remarriage Act, and he pretends to feel concerned about the fate of those people who might already have been married under the Act.

Hem-candra Banerji.

Hem-candra Banerji was born of a poor Brāhman family in 1838 in the district of Hugli. He was a student of the Hindu school and Presidency College and joined the High Court in 1861 JJ the year when Madhusudan Datta's famous book "Meghnād Badh" was published. But Hem-candra cared more for literature than for his briefs. He is regarded as the first patriot poet of Bengal. His writings are lamentations over the degeneracy of the age. He believed in a bygone but glorious age, when India's sons and daughters were perfect and free; and he wanted his people to regain that ancient golden age by doing away with the evils prevalent in Modern Hindu society. To him, the most

1. Īśvar Gupta Granthāvali (Kali-prasanna Vidyāratna Edition) pp. 39-40

grievous of these evils was the condition of women. In the whole range of Bengali literature we rarely find such passionate appeals for the removal of social injustice to women as in his writings.

In 1870 he published a book of poems, named, "Kabit-abali" or "Garland of Poems". In that book his poem on "Bidhaba Ramani" or "The Widowed Woman" is an eloquent description of the sufferings of the Hindu wodows of Bengal:-

"Yonder woman must, methinks, be an Indian wodow,
For where else could one find a woman in such a plight.
Her body is clad in dirty clothes.
Oh look, she wears none of the ornaments
With which she should be decked
Her face has lost its smile, her eyes their joy
Her happiness is at an end. Alas what a plight.
Pleasures and sorrows are all one to her for all the days to come.
Spring, autumn, and all the seasons have lost their lustre.
Night and day she wears the same raiment.
Throughout the year her sufferings know no change.
How can the widow's heart bear so great a burden?
As for that cruel race -- with hearts of stone --
That can see and hear these sufferings, and yet be blind to them

It treats children and grown women alike

And sacrifices them to social custom

If these are the words of the Scriptures of this Country, why are women born here?

Scarcely is his first wife dead before a man marries a second.

What sufferings a woman endures because she is weak." 1.

Bamkim-candra Chatterji.

Bamkim-candra Chatterji, the greatest prose writer of last century was, like Hem-candra Banerji, born in 1839. near Calcutta. He was one of the first to take the B.A. degree of the Calcutta University. This was in 1858. The same year the government offered him the post of deputy magistrate, which he filled with much credit and independence for thirty-three years. After his retirement he was given the titles of Rāy Bāhādur and C.I.E. which, says Mr Buckland in his "Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors", 'were gained rather by his reputation in the world of letters than in the public service'. His first novel "Durgeś Nandinī" was published

1. Hem-candrer Granthāvali - Basumati Edition - Bengali Era 1314- p. 349.

in 1868, and from that time forward till his death in 1894, he indefatigably served his mother tongue by his own writings and also by encouraging others to write. In this connection we may refer to the monthly paper established by him "Banga Darśan", the first real literary periodical in Bengali. In the field of religion too Bankim-candra distinguished himself. He was one of the pioneers of the Neo-Kṛṣṇa Movement in Bengal, which together with Brāhmanism and Pāmkṛṣṇaism, is one of the most influential movements in modern Bengali Hindu society. His opinion on the freedom of woman was more liberal than that of most of the orthodox men of his time and in this connection he was much influenced by the writings of John Stuart Mill.

In 1872 Bankim-candra began to publish his first social novel, "Bisorkṣa" or "Poison Tree" in serial form in the "Banga Darśan". In this book the letter of Nagendra to his friend Śrīcandra is very important for our purpose, and even to-day under the same circumstances a Bengali Hindu would probably feel just the same about

widow remarriage. Nagendra, who had already a wife, was infatuated by the beauty of the young widow Kunda and determined to marry her; So far as Śāstric questions are concerned Nagendra would naturally agree that Vidyāsāgar was the highest authority on them simply because according to his Śāstric interpretation Kunda was given the freedom to marry again. When Nagendra comes to the more important question of social sanction, he points out quite truly that society has lost its moral backbone and it yields to men like Nagendra himself who have money and influence.

But many people would not sympathise with Nagendra's desire to marry a widow, even though it were admitted that he was not thereby committing bigamy; and the women-folk of his country would be the first to condemn him. A widow's co condition, over which she has no control, does not attract much sympathy from her more fortunate sisters. The root of the evil lies in the training women receive. The majority of Hindu women even at the present day will echo the words of Sūryamukhī, who laughed at the idea of a widow marrying

again and a pandit's sanctioning it. Though we must not forget that as far Sūryamukhī herself she naturally would not wish her husband to marry again.

But on the other hand many of the young widows would no doubt share the feeling of Rohinī, who thought thus:- "For what offence of mine have I been condemned to suffer the unspeakable tortures of widowhood at such a tender age? What greater crime have I committed than the others that I cannot enjoy any happiness in the world? For what fault am I to live the life of a sapless tree though I am so young?"

In this connection we might mention that in the time of Bankim-candra probably there was a small party in Bengal, who supported widow remarriage and other social reforms for no other reason than to satify their English patrons. In his serio-comic "Inrāj Stotra" or "Hymn in praise of the English", Bankim-candra writes:- "I shall get the widows to remarry and Kulīns to loose their Kulinism, and shall abolish caste distinctions;- for then you will praise me."

From Bankim-candra's time we find the rigid rules

1. See R.C.Dutt's "Literature of Bengal", p. 229. (1895)

about food and drink, which widows were required to observe were gradually being relaxed. Society did not boycott Rohini, though it did not approve of her conduct. She no longer wore a all-white 'Sari', which is the mourning dress of a Bengali Hindu woman but a cloth with a black border. Moreover she wore bracelets on her wrists and probably chewed 'pān'-leaves, — things which a widow should not do.

In his essay on "Sāmya" or "Equality",[1] Bankim-candra expresses his own opinion on widow remarriage. Some people might wonder that being himself a champion of Neo-Hinduism, he, in this essay has not even once referred to the authority of the old śastras. He rather leaves it to the conscience of individual widows, with the sensible remark that "a wife who really loved her deceased husband could never want to marry again....But if any widow, whether she belongs to the Hindu or any other race, intends to marry again after the death of her husband she must have the right to do so." He also holds the same views on

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1. See R.C.Dutt's "Literature of Bengal". 4-pp. 228. (1895.)

the remarriage of widowers. Bankim-candra's views were quite consistent with that of the liberal section of orthodox society, which had already undergone a great modification.

Bhudeb-candra Mukherji.

Bhudeb-candra Mukherji was a great essayist. He was born in 1825, left the Hindu College in 1846, and became second teacher in the Calcutta Madrassa in 1849, was appointed Assistant Inspector of Schools in 1862. Seven years later he was promoted to the post of Inspector. In 1877 he was offered the title of C.I.E. and in 1882 became a member of the Bengal Council. He died in 1910 and he left the greater portion of his income for the furtherance of education.

Bhudeb-candra defended the custom of his forefathers not so much on the basis of any Śāstric authority; but from an alleged scientific point of view. His arguments were chiefly based on statistics gathered from different countries and he came to the conclusion that it was the natural law of hot countries, and not only of India alone,

the social customs of the Hindus, who are greater numerically. Bhudeb-candra approves this argument and makes it the keynote of his appeal for one homogeneous Indian society.

To Bhudeb-candra what is suitable to India, is more or less applicable to all hot countries. Thus he ironically says that though surely there is no predominance of Hindus in ~~in~~ the Southern parts of Europe, the number of widows is more than that in the cold countries of the continent. Then he reminds us that the percentage of widows in Greece and Italy is 12, while in Norway and Sweden it is 3. He thinks that if a correct census could be had of Turkey, Egypt, Persia and other similarly situated hot countries, it would furnish a parellel to the number of Hindu widows.[1]

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1. SP. pp 260-61.

Ramesh-candra Datta.

Ramesh-candra Datta was born in Calcutta in 1848 of an Anglicised Kayastha family. In 1868 he came to England and in the succeeding year he passed the I.C.S. Examination. During his public service he took especial interest in social activities. In 1892 he was made C.I.E. and in the following year was one of the founders of the "Bangiya Sahitya Parisad" or "Bengali Literary Academy". In 1894 he was made Commissioner of a Division -- the only Indian to attain to that position in the Civil Service during last century. In 1896 he retired from government service, and for some years was a lecturer on Indian History at University College, London. He was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1899. Then he became first revenue minister and then prime minister in the State of Baroda. Both there and in British government service he proved himself a capable administrator. His literary fame rests upon his translations of the Rgveda into Bengali, of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana

into English, and his research work on Indian History and Economics. He also wrote a number of historical novels at the suggestion it is said, of Bankim-Chandra.]

He also wrote two social novels, viz, "Sansar" or "The Family" and its sequel "Samaj or "Society", the former was published in 1885 and the latter in 1894. Though these two books cannot be accorded high rank as literature they have distinct value as attempts to portray some of the defects of the Bengali Society and their gradual improvement which in the author's opinion is to be attributed to the influence of English education and culture.

In reading "Sansar" one's sympathy is first aroused for little Sudhi who was a wife at five and a widow at seven. She was, of course, far too young to understand what either term meant, and when she returned to her own family, put off her 'ghomta' and began playing happily with her dollsshe never gave a thought to what the future might hold for her. Fortunately she was not

condemned to suffer the untold miseries of compulsory widowhood all her life. Society was gradually changing, and in Calcutta, the centre of liberalism a few educated young men were setting themselves to remove social evils and to brave the ostracism of society. One of these men, Śarat, fell in love with Sudhā, and expressed his intention of marrying her, when she was of proper age. This caused a great commotion in the community because widow-remarriage was practically an unheard of thing. The author gives us the opinions of all classes of the people.

First he speaks of the illiterate maid servant, who overheard Śarat when he was asking Sudhā's eldest sister Indu to sanction the marriage. The maidservant, we are told was quite 'flabbergasted' to hear of such a disgraceful proposal as that of marrying a widow -- such a proposal as would practically never be made even in a low caste family. She could have no more respect for gentlefolk, when things of this sort could be thought of by them and she

was sure if anyone uttered such a thing in her own community he would be put out of caste.

The author introduces us next to a middle class Hindu family in Calcutta, where the conservative and half-educated wife of Debī Bābu could not believe that people, who could marry widows, could ever really or rightly belong to the higher castes of Hindu society. She doubted the respectability of the families to which Sarat and Suchu belonged. She drew this inference from the fact that the widowed Sudhā was given coloured edged 'Śāṛīs' to wear and was more cared for by her people than was proper in the case of a widow.

Next we come to a village pandit, Diggaj Thākur, who is of a type which is not rare even to-day in Bengal, and who maintains the Vidyāsāgar by introducing the new custom of widow remarriage had played the part of a "foe to his own faith, an imitator of despicable foreigners, biassed in favour of foreign customs, a heartless person, and an unworthy scion of the Aryan race."[1]

Then the author introduces us to another class of people those who feel sincerely for young widows. Amongst them

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1. p. 169.

is Bindu, Sudhā's sister. She had a very sympathetic heart, and she could not believe that religious books could condemn people to untold miseries for no fault of their own, and that above all the Merciful God could desire that society should inflict life-long torture upon young girls.

Bindu's husband Hem-candra was a young man with modern ideas. He was in favour of widow remarriage. But as a man of the world he considered the marriage in question from every possible point of view. As for himself, he was ready to suffer ostracism with Śarat and Sudhā. But he wanted Śarat to understand the gravity of the situation. He asked Śarat if it was only a youthful fancy or if he was really prepared to undergo much suffering for Sudhā's sake and to set an example for the future good of society. Śarat's answer shows that he was fully conscious of the probable effects of the step he was taking. He knew quite well that his act would be regarded by most of his people as a disgraceful thing, and not only he and Sudhā but their sons and daughters might possibly be boycotted by society for ever. But he felt that his marriage would

make him happy in life and moreover would set an example to society. He knew that pioneers and reformers always suffered; but gradually people would understand their motives, follow their footsteps and eventually love and respect them. He points out that sea voyages and many other customs were contrary to social laws thirty years ago; but now they have become customary. He believes that the gradual reformation of harmful customs is the sign of a living society, and he wants to serve his country by helping it to get rid of harmful prohibitions and thus making it healthier and purer.

His old mother wanted her son to be happy and contented in this life; but at the same time she was afraid of the curse of society on her family. She saw her "Gurudev" or spiritual preceptor and asked his advice, as his judgment was like a quotation from the Vedas to her. The gurudeva answered this:- "No man has the power to understand God's intention. But He is merciful, and I cannot believe with my poor intelligence that He has created girl-widows to bear the sufferings of widowhood all their lives."[1]

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1. p. 207.

After the marriage had taken place in Calcutta, Śarat, Sudhī and their relations came back to their native village. But the villagers, as was expected, did not receive them at once. They demanded that Śarat should do penance; but he refused declaring that he had not committed any sin. Śarat's mother gave a feast to the Brāhmans and for a time they kept silent. Referring to this Sudhī's uncle, Tārinī Bābu, who was a bit of a wag, said with a smile: "Such is the state of things in our community that whether you marry a widow, or elope with another's wife, everything is set right, if you can fill the Brāhman's belly."[1]

But the settlement was not a permanent one. In "Samāj" which is the sequel to "Śaśīr", we read that the leading men in the community were asking if one permitted widow remarriage what else was ~~there~~ left of the Hindu religion? The author says further that even the pandits, versed in all the Śāstras, solemnly declared that widow remarriage was nothing but adultery. Society definitely rebelled against Śarat and Sudhī, and it is interesting to note how

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1. p. 210.

old Tārinī Bābu meets the situation. While he could not quarrel with the leaders of his caste, he could not bring himself to break with Bindu and Sudhī, the only relations he had. He kept up a secret connection with his nieces, but publicly boycotted them.

Śiva-nāth Śāstrī.

Śiva-nāth Śāstrī is the last of the four great men produced by the Brāhmo Samāj, the first three being Rājā Rām-mohan Rāy, Maharṣi Devendra-nāth Tagore, and Brahmānanda Keśab-candra Sen. Śiva-nāth was born in 1847 near Calcutta of an orthodox brahman family. In 1867 he came in concact with the Brāhmo preachers and two years later he joined their Samāj. His parents inflicted on him terrible sufferings, because of his change of religion, and these he faced manfully but without losing his respect for them. Himself a very great scholar he gave himself up with selfless devotion to the propagation of what he called "practical religion". In the field of politics, too, he was one of the small group of men, who in 1877 brought into being the "Indian Association", the first democratic political organ-

isation of the Bengalis. After the "Cooch Behar Marriage" in 1878 owing to disagreements with his leader Keśab-Candra upon the question of social reform Śiva-nāth left the Samaj to form a separate Samaj, called "Sādhāran" or "Common". He tried to make this organisation a real success both in and outside Bengal, and he travelled as a preacher all over India. In Bengali literature his autobiography and his life of Rāmtanu Lāhirī will always occupy a high position, and though his social activities hampered his literary work a great deal, yet in the history of Bengali journalism and fiction he will always be remembered as a meritorious writer. He died in 1919.

One year after the publication of Ramés-candra Datta's "Samāj", there appeared "Yugāntar" or "The New Age" (1895) by Śiva-nāth Śāstrī. In this and his other social novels he draws a tolerably accurate picture of Bengali society. In "Yugāntar" the author describes the great agitation which began with the publication of Vidyāsāgar's book on widow remarriage. The effects of the book upon sleeping Bengal, says Śiva-nāth, was as bewildering and terrifying as though a cannon ball had suddenly fallen on a sleeping

village at midnight. He added that it was an undreamt-of-thing to put forward a proposal for widow remarriage in a country where only a few years ago widows were thrown on the funeral pyre. together with their dead husbands, and where on the Ekadasi day widows were not allowed a drop of water even when they were actually dying of thirst.

The author gives us the opinions of two kinds of pandits about Vidyāsāgar's book. Vidyāratna was the typical representative of one school. He like the Diggaj Thākur in "Sansār", described Vidyasagar as the worst of Brahmins, a renegade, a moral wreck and an atheist, and further he would not allow anyone to pollute his house by bringing Vidyasagar's book into it. But in Bengal as a whole, the percentage of Vidyāratnas was not high. Most pandits were of the type of Tarkālankār Mahāśay. He, while appreciating Vidyāsāgar's correct quotations from the Śāstras and the cleverness of the conclusions he drew from them, admits that in these matters social custom alone has the last word. He says it is better to advise asceticism for widows, so that worldly desires may not come to their hearts. But

the most interesting opinion we get on the point is from Bijayā, Tarkabhusan's sister, firstly because she herself was a widow, and moreover because shew as the widow of a man of modern ideas. She does not bel eve that the sorrows of widows are due to their not marrying. The root of the trouble is that most widows have no work to do, and therefore have to live a life of subjection and be dependent on others. She would like to found an institution where they could get a little education and learn some kind of work by means of which they could earn their own living. She does not see that there is any need for widows to remarry if they are engaged in serving their friends and relations, and the community. She regards it as an insult to widowsif people think that unless they marry again, they will pine away. She admits that celibacy should not be thrust on widows, but at the same time she does not wish to compel widows to marry again as a duty. She would like to leave it to the conscience of individual widows. But as for herself she thought that widows ought rather to be advised

to give themselves to ascetisism and celibacy.

Rabíndra-nāth Tagore.

Rabíndra-nāth Tagore, probably the greatest writer that Bengal has yet produced, was born in 1861 in the most highly cultured of all Bengali families. His overwhelming genius supported by the training that he received from his distinguished father made him one of the greatest educationalists of his race. During the Svadesī movement he silently retired to the Retreat of Sīntiníketan which was founded by his father in 1901, and there established amodel educational institution ~~for the young generation.~~ Very probably in this matter he was inspired by the example of his father, who in 1840 founded a home for Hindu learning and culture called Tattvabodhinī Pathsālā. But the son went further. His University of Visva-Bharatī, which has, of late, been evolved from the Sīntiniketan School, has been made a centre where "Indian thought might be studied as a whole in relation the West;" and where the East and West could meet in love

and truth. Rabīndra-nāth first became famous in 1887 when he fearlessly refuted the arguments brought forward by the literary prince of the time, Bankim-candra Chatterji, on behalf of the New Hindu Movement. By his songs, poems and prose writings Rabindra-nath vastly improved the vernacular as a literary medium. His "Gītāñjalī" or "Song Offerings" was published in English in 1910, and for this in 1913 he was awarded the Nobel Prize. The same year the Calcutta University honoured him by conferring upon him the degree of Doctor of Literature. In the succeeding year he was given a Knighthood by the government.

In his "Yurop Yatrīr Dāyarī" or "The Diary of a Pilgrim to Europe", which was published in 1891,[1] Rabindra-nath has points out that the Hindu widows of Bengal are not the only women in this world who are to be pitied. To him it seems that the English old maid is more to be pitied than the Bengali widow. The old maid's empty heart gradually dries

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1. ~~XXXp59~~.

up, and she lavishes her care upon a little puppy, and spends her time organising associations for the public good. Thus her affection is squandered in many artificial ways, though her soul never gets real satisfaction.

But on the other hand, the author tells us that the arms of a Bengali widow are never empty, her hands are never without work and her heart is never in solitude. Sometimes she is a mother, sometimes she is a daughter, and sometimes she is a friend. For this reason throughout her life she is gentle, lovable, affectionate and engaged in service. Therefore her womanly nature never hardens. She is connected with the other women of the house by an old friendly bond of love, which is full of both happiness and sorrows. With men of the house she has a relation of affection, regard and good humour.

In this connection Rabindra-nath lays special stress on the motherhood of the Bengali widow. The children of her house are born before her eyes, and are brought up in her arms. Further after performing her domestic duties

she reads or hears the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata or one of the Purāṇas, and then when it is evening -- she draws the little children near her in order to tell them stories, and that is also a work of affection. The author maintains there is no unoccupied corner in a widow's heart.

Rabindra-nāth in his article "Chithi Patra" or "Letters" published in 1885 makes us realise that it is the difference between marriage ideals of European and Indian society that has led to their different attitude towards widow remarriage. A Hindu wife's love is in reality given to the abstract term "husband", and the real man is only the comparatively remote object of her affection. For this reason her love never depends on the good or bad nature of a particular man. Every husband of every wife is equally venerated. She marries an ideal and not a man; and so the marriage tie is not broken with the death of the husband. But the love and regard of a European wife is confined to one individual man and not to an ideal. Hence her love and

regard depend upon the good or evil in the man who is her husband. It is for this reason that no fault is found with widow remarriage in Europe. There a woman does not marry an ideal but a man, so with the death of that man the marriage tie is broken.[1]

Svamī Vivekānanda.

Of the three teachers, --Śiva-nāth Śāstrī, Rabīndra-nāth Tagore and Svāmī Vivekānanda, who directly helped most in the social reconstruction of the twentieth century, the last is the idol of the orthodox section, though his extreme views on the liberty of Hindu women have not yet found favour with his professed admirers. His idea was to liberalise Hindu orthodoxy, to give a Vedantic version of popular Hinduism, and also to preach the teaching of his master Rāmkṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa that every religious creed leads people to the same Supreme Being, and

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1. Sj pp 85-86.

that therefore all creeds deserve equal veneration. Vivekānanda first became known to the public in 1893 when he attended the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in his 31st year. From that time onward he lectured in India and elsewhere on the Vedānta until his death in 1902. His greatest success was his revival of the ancient Hindu monastic system on the basis of philanthropy and religious toleration under the name of the Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission. Many homes and monasteries have been founded under this organisation. He intended starting nunneries for Hindu women, and encouraged his disciple Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble of Wimbledon) to open a school at Bāgbāzār in Calcutta with the object of training Hindu girls. His Bengali books, both his original works and his translations from English are still regarded as a great source of inspiration by the budding patriots of Bengal.

While Rabīndra-nāth Tagore was studying social problems

1. Pat I. — pp 171-173.

in a new light, Svāmī Vivekānanda began to put forward his new arguments in support of the old Śāstric decisions against certain social customs including widow remarriage. In 1902 he explained to a friend that it was from sheer necessity that widow remarriage came to be prohibited amongst the higher castes of the Hindus. For, amongst them the number of women was so abnormally great in comparison with that of men that it widows, who had once enjoyed a husband's companionship, were not forbidden to remarry, it would be impossible to find one husband for every woman. He believes, however, that when society no longer needs it, compulsory widowhood will disappear. He says:- "If it be necessary to change any social custom, the necessity underlying it should be found out first of all, and by altering it the custom will die of itself."[1] Throughout Vivekānanda's arguments one thing we cannot help noticing and thais is his oversight of the hard case of child widows.

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1. Pat 1. -- pp 111-113.

But whatever excuses he put forward for existing customs, Svāmī Vivekānanda could not help condemning many of them, not only as unnecessary but because they were consuming the vitality of the nation. He ridiculed his community which like a wicked tyrant wanted to produce martyrs and self-sacrificing people in its ranks by vile compulsion alone. He complained that in the Hindu community "a man's birth, his eating, drinking and other things, his marriage, and even his death are controlled by the Śāstric regulations." Vivekānanda was sure that it was impossible to make out of Hindu widows models of sacrifice by thrusting Brahmacarya on them. Love and sacrifice are things to be evolved from within and not to be imposed from without. "What glory is there in the sacrifice of a person," asks Svāmī Vivekānanda, "who has nothing to give? ...Is there any meaning in the self-sacrifice of one, who has no thought, no heart, no ideal, no knowledge whatever of social good or evil?"[1].

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1. Pat 1 -- pp. 121-124.

Section II.

"BAHU BIBAHA" OR POLYGAMY.

INTRODUCTION.

The Hindu child in Bengal sits evening by evening at his grandmother's side listening to the stories that she tells, and evening by evening he hears in one form or another the same old tale of a legendary king who had two queens. The elder and therefore the neglected one generally passed her days in sorrow and suffering, while her younger and more favoured rival got all the happiness and luxury usually associated with queens. The child finds the picture drawn by his grandmother corroborated by the still more authoritative details of Hindu mythology which are represented before his own eyes in the images of the gods.

The great god Visnu has two wives. The boy learns the village proverb that Laksmī and Sarasvatī - Visnu's wives- never agree; and he concludes that co-wives can never be friends. He may even see his own little sister making certain vows and performing ceremonies in which she curses the co-wives that may come into her married life, and may

hear her praying devoutly that she may not have to marry a polygamous husband.

Then when the lad grows old enough to begin children's story books, he finds in them many instances of polygamy. His affectionate heart feels for the child-saint Dhruva, who was compelled to leave his father's palace owing to his step-mother's tyranny over his own mother and himself. A Bengali boy cannot refrain from tears when his hero Rām-candra is banished by his royal father through the trickery of his wicked step-mother.[1]

When the Bengali lad becomes a man, if he reads the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, he will find in them plenty of examples of polygamous marriages. If he proceeds further he will read in the Upaniṣads the accounts of two illustrious women Gārgī and Maitreyī, who were also co-wives. He will even find in the Veda itself the saying

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Note.-- 1. Rām-candra's father King Daśarath had three principal queens, besides a large number of subordinate wives.

"As round a single sacrificial post two tethers can be tied, so one person can marry two wives."[1]

If the man, interested in the social history of his own race, turns over the pages of his national literature, he will hear the same echo even there. Mukunda-rām Chakravarttī of the seventeenth century, and Bhārat-candra Rāy of the eighteenth century, painted in their poems elaborate serio-comic pictures of the bad relations of co-wives. The writers of the nineteenth century too, talked much about polygamy, but nearly always in condemnation of it. No doubt many among the earlier writers also realised that the results of polygamy were evil, but until the beginning of the nineteenth century no definite practical attempt was made to abolish the custom.

It is true that every Hindu, in the old days was not a polygamist. But though they always showed a very high respect for monogamists,[2] Hindus had not before their eyes

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1. (a) Taittirīya Śākhā -- Yajur Veda. (a) Kānda 6, Pra 6, Anu 4. (b) " 6, " 5, " 1.
(b) See Rāja Rādhā-kānta Deb's petition to the Legislative Council of India in 1856.
2. Note.-- The monogamy practised by Rām-candra and his brothers was by no means exceptional.

any practical example of a monogamous society. Their Mussalman neighbours had even religious sanction for a plurality of wives.[1] It was the advent of Western culture which suggested to the Hindus the ideal of an absolutely monogamous community.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century we find Rām-mohan Rāy raising his voice against unrestricted polygamous marriages. But it was not till 1850 that the real agitation began. In 1856 Rām-mohan Rāy's English treatise on polygamy was reprinted,[2] and in 1854 Rāmnārāyan Tarkaratna published his famous Bengali drama "Kulīn-Kula-Sarbasva" or "A Kulīn Family Fortune." It was a piece of pure propaganda, and probably exaggerated the actual facts. While Northern and Western India were in the throes of the Sepoy Mutiny, in many parts of Bengal, people were listening to and applauding this drama.

It was Īśvar-candra Vidyāsāgar, however, who definitely

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1. Quaran. Al-Nisa. Ver. 3. IS. 3rd Edition. p. 81.
2. It was first printed in 1822. BRS. pp. 375-384.
   The name of the booklet is "Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females, According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance."

tried to establish by law the system of monogamy in Hindu society. After the Widow Remarriage Act had been passed by the Legislative Council, Vidyāsāgar submitted his petition in favour of compulsory monogamy, and published a book in order to convince people that polygamy was contrary to the Hindu Śāstras. The government had to postpone the consideration of this reform owing to the suspension of normal activities during the Sepoy Mutiny.

Ten years after Vidyāsāgar appealed to the government again; and a good many leading Hindus signed the petition. But the opposition was too strong to allow of the passing of a law. Being defeated in this Vidyāsāgar tried to get social sanction for monogamy from the orthodox leaders of society. Moreover he issued a pledge to be signed by young men, which contained the following amongst its clauses:-

(i) "I will not marry while my first wife is living," and (ii) "I will not give my daughter in marriage to a man who has a wife living."

Though the orthodox Hindus did not want a non-Hindu government to meddle in their social affairs, they, as well as their liberal brethren, already felt the necessity of giving up polygamous marriages. In this respect the orations of Keśab-candra Sen and his friends helped a great deal to

to create a healthy atmosphere amongst the younger generation. Nor must we overlook the pressure exerted by increasing economic stringency, which compelled a man to think twice before he assumed the financial responsibility of a second marriage.

And so it came to pass that in the closing years of last century, the practice of polygamy was almost entirely discarded by the Hindus of Bengal.[1] It is in the two matters of Satidaha and polygamy that Hindus have been most successful in improving the social status of women. But there is this difference that the abolition of Satīdāha was effected by a compulsory legal enactment, while the disappearance of polygamy has been brought about by a modification of popular sentiment.

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1. There are, it is true, some extremely rare cases of bigamy, but probably these are primarily due to the fact that there is no divorce in Hindu society as Hindu marriages are not a contract but religious sacrament. Bigamy is also often excused on the ground of the barrenness of a first wife.

P O L Y G A M Y.

Rām-mohan Rāy.[1]

Rām-mohan Rāy had noticed that in Tirhut efforts were already being made in his time to check unrestricted polygamy.[2] In Bengal, itself, however, the custom was still quite generally practised. There still "we see" says Ram-mohan, "that a man married in most cases two, three, ten or even more wives; whereas a woman is allowed one husband only."[3]

From his writings we gather that there were four in Bengali society which encouraged the custom of polygamy. (1) The custom of professional marriage, especially amongst the Kulin Brahmans, who married generally for the money gifts that were sure to accompany the ceremony. (2) Bad behaviour on the part of the wife might induce her husband to ignore her and take a second wife. (3) Men sometimes preferred more than one wife "merely to gratify their brutal inclinations." (4) The existing law of the land made women economically helpless and dependent on men.

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1. For a sketch of Rām-mohan Rāy's life see pages 6-7.
2. Vide RRE -- footnote of p. 379.
3. RB. p. 210.

Rām-mohan Rāy says "The evil consequences arising from such polygamy, the public may easily guess, from the nature of the fact itself, without my being reduced to the mortification of particularising those which are known by the native public to be of daily occurrence."[1]

"Many Kulīn Brāhmans," says the author, "who marry ten or fifteen wives only for the sake of money, after marriage, either do not meet any of them at all, or see some of their wives only two or four times in their lives." [2]

But inspite of this cruel negligence on the part of their polygamous husbands, the wives were not generally bad. "Many of these women are controlled by religious scruples," says Rām-mohan, "and so inspite of not seeing their husbands or not having their welfare looked after by their rightful protectors, they live at the houses of fathers or brothers patiently bearing all the sorrows of a dependent life, and practising religion all their days." "The wives whose husbands have two or three wives have to endure night and day mental anguish, and to put up with the quarrelsomeness (of their rivals), yet many of them bear their sufferings for fear of God. In some cases it happens that the husband regularly

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1. RRB. pp. 375-384.
2. RB. p. 206.

takes the side of one wife and persecutes the other.[1]

Rām-mohan was the first Bengali to oppose the prevailing custom of polygamy. He thought it his duty to warn his people that this system was directly opposed to the Hindu Law and he quoted ancient law-givers, including Yajnabalkya and Manu, in order to point out that only in eleven special circumstances could a wife be superceded by a rival. Even then, when the fault is not of the first wife's own creation and if she is good, the husband should get her permission first before he takes another woman as his wife.[2] The eleven circumstances are (1) the vice of drinking spirituous liquors, (2) incurable sickness, (3) deception, (4) barrenness, (5) extravagance, (6) frequent use of offensive language, (7) immoral action, (8) manifestation of hatred towards her husband, (9) mischievousness, (10) producing only female offspring, and (11) when her children are all dead.[2]

Then Ram-mohan makes the following suggestion to the government:-

"Had a magistrate or other public officer been authorised

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1. RB. pp. 207-208.

2. It is evident that any man who wished to marry another wife, would be able to find amongst these eleven reasons at least one to justify his action.

by the rulers of the empire to receive applications for his sanction to a second marriage during the life of the first wife, and to grant his consent only on such accusations as the foregoing being substantiated, the above Law might have been rendered effectual, and the distress of the female sex in Bengal, and the number of suicides would have been necessarily very much reduced." [1]

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1. (a) RRE. p. 380.

(b) If we consider the social conditions of the time this may be counted the first great step towards checking polygamy. But we must say it was not a just solution, for, no remedy was suggested to ease the life of unfortunate women, whose husbands were guilty of the faults mentioned above. And further in a society where producing only female offspring was regarded as a reasonable excuse for a second marriage for the husband, the emancipation of women could not be said to have made much progress.

Isvar-candra Gupta.[1]

In the poems of Isvar-candra Gupta we get a graphic description of the evil effects of Kulin polygamy.[2]

"Tell me how I can respect Kulinism, where the death of one man makes a hundred women widows; where a weak dying man marries a baby in her mother's arms; and where a male child, whose first teeth have not yet been cut, is married to a woman, who is old enough to be his grandmother. How can a man and his wife be happy unless they are of a like age? And these evils give rise to adultery. I certainly respect the nine essential and good points of Kulinism, but apart from this point, the Kula is the centre of vice; and why should I glorify sin? Oh merciful God, I humbly pray to Thee to destroy the Kulinism of this country."[3]

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1. For a short sketch of Isvar-candra Gupta's life see pp. 24-26.
2. Originally Kaulinya or Kulinism is said to have been an order of nobility conferred on certain members of the higher castes of Bengal, who possessed nine distinct qualifications. The Kulin must possess good manners, modesty, education, reputation devotion, scholarship, penance and charity, and must have performed pilgrimages. The order of Kulinism was said to have been created by King Ballal Sen of Bengal; and re-organised amongst the Brahmans by Devivar Ghatak, probably in order to reconstruct society after the chaos created by the inter-mingling of different races in Bengal especially under the Buddhist sway. Kulinism was at first a personal order ofmerit; but soon it became rigidly hereditary. The above mentioned nine qualities were no longer essential; but the name Kulin remained a very great asset in social matters. Non-Kulins were proud to marry, if possible, into Kulin families; but no Kulin would think of giving his daughters in marriage to a man of lower rank. This encouraged polygamy to a frightful extent.
3. See footnote on p.68

Dīna-bandhu Mitra.

Dīna-bandhu Mitra, one of the pioneers of modernised Bengali drama, was born in Nadia in 1829. He came of a poor Kayastha family. With great difficulty he managed to complete his student career in the Hindu School in 1855, and obtained a good appointment in the postal department, in which he served with distinction until his death. He was also given the title of "Ray Bāhādur" for his services. While he was in the Hindu College he came into contact with the "Young Bengal" movement, started by Derozio.[1] He was also greatly influenced by the Christian and Brāhmo missionaries; and we can trace in his writings his antagonism to Hindu orthodoxy and particularly to Vaisnavism. In his "Sadhabār Ekādasī," he has given us such a startlingly realistic picture of the darker side of Bengali life in his time, that many people objected to it as demoralising, and the government for some years had to prohibit its being put upon the stage. In private life he was very

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1. See pp. 15-18.

Footnote No. 3 from preceeding page.

3. The quotation is from Īsvar-candra's poem called "Kaulīnya." Īsvar-candra Gupta Granthāvalī (Kālī-prasanna Vidyāratna Edition) p. 59.

witty, a brilliant conversationalist, very tender-hearted, and bore a very high moral character. But his popularity was mainly due to his drama "Nīl Darpaṇ," which exposed the cruel treatment of their tenants by the British indigo planters. The translation of "Nīl Darpaṇ" which created a great sensation at that time was published under the name of the Rev. James Long,[1] the noble-hearted missionary, who took a paternal care of Dīna-bandhu in his early student life, and who was sent to jail by the government because of the translation. In 1873 Dīna-bandhu, who was only 44, succumbed to diabetes.]

We find from the "Suradhunī Kābya"[2] of Dīna-bandhu Mitra, that Kulīns, some of whom "married a hundred times", often kept notebooks containing the names and addresses of their wives lest they should forget them.

These Kulīns, cared very little for their wives, and

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1. The original "Nīl Darpaṇ" was published without the author's name. It was translated into English to reach a larger public, but the translator, Madhusudan Datta, remained incognito for a time till he was found out and punished. But through the help of his friends the author himself escaped detection.
2. Composed about 1865 and published in 1871.

only visited them when they required money, while their wives spent their miserable days in their paternal homes. The poet says:-

"A Kulīn is cruel, heartless, mean and a rogue. He lives at his own house in a most thoughtless manner. But his wives live as beggars at their fathers' houses with tears flowing from their eyes. They are without food and clothing, and are wretched. Their brothers' wives do not speak kindly to them. And they, husbandless as they are, always remain with their faces downcast. Sometimes the girl has to do the work of a cook, sometimes that of a waitress, and even then she has no pleasure in her food."

But neglect by the husband and torture in a brother's family were not her only sufferings. There was something more. The poet continues:-

"If, when the husband is living, the wife remains in her father's home in the prime of her youth, be she good and chaste as Savitri, the people who delight in scandal, talk about her.... already she is a poor girl, ever neglected by her husband, and in addition she has to suffer the torture of scandal."[1]

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1. Works of Dīna-bandhu Mitra. Basumatī Edition (1901) p. 637.

Hem-candra Banerji.[1]

The poems of Hem-candra Banerji suggest that the Kulin girl evidently considered marriage as the ideal of her life. We find no trace of the modern idea that a woman's place is not only by her husband's fireside, but that she can realise the object of her life by devoting herself to social service. He sets before the "heartless men" of his community the picture of Kulin women who had put forth every effort to get married, and, if unsuccessful, spent the rest of ~~their lives~~ her life yearning for the unattainable.[2]

But if the husband did come, a Kulin girl lost no opportunity of welcoming him with her bridal garland, even when the man was on the verge of death. This was due both to the compulsion of society and the training she received.

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1. For a sketch of the life of Hem-candra Banerji see pp. 28-29.
2. "Look, you heartless men. how the unmarried Kulin girls- many of them like so many mad women - with garland in hand are looking out from their houses for husbands that do not come." - Bharat Kamini.

In this connection the poet says that "some Kulīn girls are placing their bridal garlands on the necks of dying men, themselves nigh to death with sorrow while at the same time wiping away the tears that gather in their eyes." [1]

In his "Kulīn-Mahilā-Bilāp" or "The Lamentations of Kulīn Ladies," the poet tells us that the custom of Kulīn polygamy is by no means of recent origin. It is a thing of seven hundred years standing -- that is, as ancient as the days of the creation of Kulīnism itself, which is said to have originated in the twelfth century, and it has remained practically undisturbed throughout theintervening centuries. The poem was composed when Vidyāsāgar sent his petition to the government of India, asking it to enact a law for compulsory monogamy amongst the Hindus. It is a pathetic appeal by the married Kulin women of Bengal to their woman sovereign, Queen Victoria, to grant Vidyāsāgar's petition and thus to save the prospective Kulin brides from the unenviable fate. Here is the translation of the poem:-

"Mother, for the last seven hundred years upon this earth, our mothers and grandmothers have been weeping thus day by day and generation after generation, and ~~also~~ alas, it is

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1. Hem-candrer Granthāvalī -- Basumatī Edition -- Bengali Era 1314. p. 345.

our hard fate still to suffer in the same way.

"In the meantime many a king has come and gone, many a proud name has been brought low, many a meteor has fallen, and many a hill has been overthrown.;

"Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, and English have ruled the land; scriptures, religions and doctrines of many kinds have arisen and fallen in this land of Bharat, and yet our sufferings are unrelieved...

"O Mother, hundreds of times have we called on the Disposer of all things, times without number have we prayed to many a god; but still the anguish of our hearts has not been healed, -- Heaven methinks must be void of gods. Come once, O Mother, O Sovereign Lady of Britain, and let us shew you what burning sorrow is ever in our souls...

"It were better if God had made us widows. We should not have had to weep like this with our husbands still alive. Husbands, fathers, brothers, friends have spurned us with their feet, but O Queen-Mother spurn us not, helpless women in distress.

"O Mother, how may we tell you of the anguish of our hearts, -- not even a slave girl has such a hard lot.

Girls of sixteen years old and old women alike are weeping every day, counting the hours and minutes as they pass. Some are weeping for want of food for themselves; while tears flow from the eyes of others with babes in their arms. O Mother, our hair stands on end with fright, and our hearts are broken, as we think upon the raging flood of wickedness.

"Ah, the heartless pride nurtured by Kulinism. Ah, the heartless customs kept up by cannibals. What has happened to us cannot be undone now, but O Mother, we beg of you to save these, our daughters."[1]

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1. Hem-candrer Granthabali - Basumati Edition - Bengali Era 1314. pp. 413-14.

Bankim-candra Chatterji.[1]

Bankim-candra Chatterji wrote at a time, when, under the leadership of Īsvar-candra Vidyāsāgar, the advanced Hindus were trying to get a law compelling monogamy passed. This agitation naturally left its mark on his writings. For a direct statement of Bankim-candra's own opinion on the subject of polygamy one may read his criticism of Vidyāsāgar's book "Babu Bibāha" or "Polygamy." In the Banga Darsan of Āṣāṛh 1873. In answering his venerable opponent Bankim-candra draws attention particularly to the following points:-

(1) He maintains that Vidyāsāgar did not speak the whole truth when he said that the Śāstras had never sanctioned polygamy.

(2) Though Bankim-candra agrees that all the Hindus did not practise monogamy, he doubted if in Bengal one among ten thousand men was polygamous. And moreover, this small minority was getting less every day. He therefore does not see any need for any legislation or for a pronouncement from any pandit to root out this small minority. (3) He believes that the low percentage of polygamous marriages in Bengal is due to

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1. For a sketch of the life of Bankim-candra Chatterji see pp. 30-3

the slow and steady reformation of the customs of the country, "which are more powerful than the Dharma Śāstras." It is a result of this slow process of reform that "it has been brought home to the people of this country that polygamy is harmful to society, that it ought to be universally discountenounced, and that it is contrary to the laws of nature." Bankim-candra suggests that the betterment of socialcustoms "may be due to the spread of good education, or of European morals, or to the general progress of our country."

But whatever Bankim-candra's own view might be as a man, his novels do not suggest that polygamy is always deserving of unqualified condemnation. And though in "Bisbṛksa" and "Rajani," we find bigamy ruining family happiness, in "Sītārām" and "Devīcandhurani" we have the other side of the picture.

"Bisbṛksa" and "Rajani" were published in 1873 and in 1877 respectively, and they profess to deal witht he author's own time. In "Bisbṛksa" we find Sūryamukhī marrying her husband Nagendra to Kunda, because she understood that without her, Nagendra's life would be joyless. But with all her self

sacrifice, Sūryamukhī could not control herself. When she saw Nagendra with his newly married wife, Sūryamukhī could not bear the painful sight. She asked her sister-in-law: "Kamal, is there any country where people do not allow daughters to live?" Later Sūryamukhī left her home and husband in sorrow and despair.

Kunda, for her part, was not a bad woman. She never forgot Sūryamukhī's loving care in her distress. She was sincerely grieved when she heard the rumour of her "Satīn's" (i.e. co-wife's) death. The author says:- "She was too thick-witted to understand that the death of a "Satīn" is a matter for smiles not tears." Even on her death-bed she takes an affectionate farewell of the "Satīn." But throughout the book we notice that after Nagendra's marriage with Kunda, none of the three was really happy. They suffered terrible mental agony, though both the wives had a deep affection for Nagendra.

The author places some arguments in favour of polygamy in the mouth of Nagendra, when, infatuated by the beauty of Kunda, he determined to marry her. These arguments

are embodied in a letter, which Nagendra wrote in reply to one from his brother-in-law Śriś-candra, in which the latter condemned Nagendra's proposed bigamous marriage. While repudiating Śriś-candra's argument that bigamy is contrary to morality, he admits that the monogamous ideal came from the English. "But do the English make no mistake?" asks Nagendra. He also says that "a custom is contrary to the moral code if it may harm many people," and he doubts if polygamy is harmful to the majority of people. But when Śriś-candra points out to him that polygamy always results in family quarrels, Nagendra says that monogamy may lead to the extinction of a family which is an even greater evil than family quarrels. If it be argued that if polygamy is permissible, polyandry also should be allowed. Nagendra replies that in a society where polyandry is prevalent, "it is not possible to find out the father of the children; and as a father is responsible for the maintenance of his child uncertainty in this matter might cause social chaos. But if a man has two wives, there is no uncertainty about the mother of the children."

Whatever theoretical arguments Nagendra might use before his marrying a second wife, it is evident that as a matter of fact he was never happy with his two wives.

In "Rajanī" we meet another type of "Satīn." The elder wife of Rāmsaday Bābu was quite a nonentity and the younger one, Lalita-labaṁga-latā, was the real wife. The childless second wife loved her "satīn's" son Sachindra, but the latter, inspite of all his affection for his step-mother, could not overlook his father's neglect of his own mother.

In the same book we find Gopāl Bābu's wife Champā, who did not hesitate to take recourse to any foul means that came in her way to prevent her husband marrying another woman. She warned Rajanī, her husband's proposed second wife, that if the marriage took place she would poison her.

"Sītārām" and "Devī-caudhuranī" deal with an earlier period than that in which Bamkim-candra lived. But we may gather from them some idea of his feelings on the question of polygamy. Sītārām has three wives of whom the first becomes an ascetic, thus leaving him to divide his time between his other two wives, Nandā and Ramā. Nandā and Ramā are not quarrelsome as "satīns" generally are, but at

the same time they cannot trust each other implicitly. This mistrust manifests itself when, under the terror of a Mussalman invasion, Ramā thought about the welfare of her son. She was ready to die, but what about her son? Could she trust her "satīn" Nandī in such distress? She thought that she could not place the child in the hands of a "satīn", for could a step-mother care for a "satīn's" son? Again on her death-bed, when Ramā entreats her husband to take care of her child, she repeats "I thought of giving him to Bara Rānī, but now I place him in your hands."

Nandī was also jealous of Ramā. But her jealousy was not permanent. She was somewhat indifferent so far as her "satīn" was concerned. When the Mussalman invaders were at the gates of Sītārām's capital, though the thought "I shall be relieved if the "satīn" die" flashed once through her mind, the next moment she thought:- "But seeing that my husband has given me the charge of the inner apartments, I will save my 'satīn even at the sacrifice of my own life." Further when scandal was spread about Ramā's character, Nandā

showed her genuine sympathy and kindness.

The only novel of Bamkim-candra which fully justifies the happiness of a polygamous home is "Devi-caudhurani." The hero of it - Brajesvar - has three wives: Praphulla, Nayān and Sāgar. Of the three Praphulla was turned out of her husband's home just after marriage, and she could not come back for many years. The youngest, Sāgar, had a rich father and seldom came to her husband's home. But whenever she came, she could not get on well with her elder 'satīn' Nayīn, who was jealous of both her 'satīns.' Once when she heard the rumour of Praphulla's death, Nayan felt herself "free from one sin", and she prayed to be freed from the other sin also, i.e. from Sāgar. Again after Praphulla's return to her husband's home "Nayantārā began to hiss as a snake would hiss if it was shut up in a pot."

Praphulla was a woman of a very different type. Though driven out by her father-in-law, she saved his honour. At the risk of her own life, she saved his life

too, when he was planning her ruin. Her love towards her husband was very deep, and at the same time her affection towards her 'satīns' was wonderful. When her husband received her back she proved herself an ideal 'satīn'. She won the hearts of both Nayān and Sāgar. Nayān saw that Praphulla cared for her sons more than Nayān herself ever cared for them, and so she handed them to Praphulla's charge. Sāgar could no longer stay at her father's home as she could not be so happy with anyone else as she was with Praphulla. The only quarrel that Praphulla had was with Brajesvar. Praphulla used to say:- "I am not your only wife. You belong as much to Sāgar and Nayān as to me....If you don't love them as you love me, your love towards me is not complete. They are also I."

It is this high philosophy of 'satīn'-hood, which enabled Praphulla to create a happy and healthy atmosphere even in a home, where there were three 'satīns.' Praphulla had received from Bhawānī Thākur the practical training of the Niskām Dharma of the Gītā, while she was away from home, and this was a great help to her in her house-

hold duties. She was not only highly educated and extremely religious, but there was something more in her. She was an incarnation of the One, Who is not new but old, Who came many times in the past and has come again to teach the forgetful world its duty. The conclusion that one reaches from Bankim-candra's novels, is that as a rule, polygamous marriages are harmful, and their bad effects can only be set right if amongst the 'satīs', there are women of extraordinary personality like Praphulla.

Ramesh-candra Datta.

Very few Bengali writers after Bankim-candra Chatterji make any reference to polygamy. Śiva-nāth Śāstrī and Vivekānanda Svāmī, who may be taken as representing two distinct Bengali schools of thought, do not deal with the subject. The fact is that monogamy has now for many years been the regular practice, though one does occasionally still meet cases of polygamy. We may deal here with the few cases in which the subject figures in Bengali literature after Bankim-candra.

In 1894 -- the year of Bankim-candra Chatterji's death -- two distinguished writers published stories dealing with polygamy. One was a novel, "Samaj," written by Ramesh-candra Datta,[1] and the other a short story, "Madhya-Barttini" by Rabindra-nath Tagore.

In "Samaj", Ramesh-candra draws a picture of society where on the one hand the social leaders were doing their utmost to prevent the remarriage of the girl Sudha, because she was a widow; while on the other they were bringing all their pressure to bear on her uncle, Tarini Babu, a man of fifty to compel him to take a second wife, because he had lost his only daughter, and because his wife was too old to bear any more children. Gopa-bala, the bride-elect, was only nine years old. Besides, she was a playmate of the daughter of Tarini Babu's eldest niece and was looked upon by him and his wife as their grandchild.

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1. For a sketch of the life of Ramesh-candra Datta see pp. 38-39.

The social leaders, Brāhman pandits, and friends of Tārinī Bābu were all in favour of this marriage. The writer sarcastically observes that the leaders of society thought that Tarini Babu had just reached a mature age for marriage. They were also sure that the girl's forefathers would attain salvation because of this marriage. The Brāhman pandits expressly said that this marriage was quite according to the Śāstras, for Tārinī Bābu should marry a second wife as he had no child by his first wife. As for Tārinī Bābu, man of the world as he was, he soon forgot about the death of his daughter. With all his pretended unwillingness to marry a second time he could not help feeling regret that the name of his forefathers would die out unless he had a son. So he began preparations for a new marriage. The bride herself wanted the marriage, because she would be the wife of a rich man. But, of course, she was too young to understand all that was involved.

In a community where child marriage is customary,

the happiness of a girl depends to a large extent on her guardians. But there are guardians who think of themselves first. We can find a typical example of this in Gopa-bālī's brother. When he found out that Tārinī Bābu wished to marry his siter, he took advantage of this splendid opportunity to get some money from Tārinī Bābu. He cared nothing for the future happiness of this little girl. For it was his opinion that "girls are born for the pleasure of men and to propagate the family." (p. 22).

The only one to protest was the mother who was naturally anxious about the future of her daughter. When the "Ghaṭaki"[1] or the matchmaker came to her with the proposal, she became angry, and wondered why Yama, the god of Death, had forgotten old folk, like Tārinī Bābu,

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1. A ghaṭak (f. ghaṭakī) is a marriage-broker. The ghatak system is almost extinct now, but was prevalent in Bengal in the last century. A free choice had little place in a Hindu marriage, and as communication between different places was very difficult, the ghataks acted as a sort of marriage agency. They used to gather all information about marriageable boys and girls and charged fees for it. Many a time a marriage arranged by the unscrupulous ghaṭaks proved unhappy. Nowadays where there is no free choice the guardians and friends of boy and girl negotiate the marriage.

In later days the place of the ghataks has been to some extent taken by the advertisement columns of the press and matrimonial clubs, like Prajāpati Samiti, each with its own organ.

who felt no shame in proposing such a marriage. She declined to marry her little girl of nine to an old man of fifty. For the sake of her child's future happiness, she preferred like-long poverty for her daughter to social honour and wealth purchased at such a price.

It is evident from the tone of the writing that the writer's own views were expressed through the mouth of the mother.

Rabīndra-nāth Tagore.[1]

In Rabīndra-nāth Tagore's "Madhyabarttini" or "The Interloper,"[2] we find an instance where bigamy was due to the foolish affection of a wife for her husband. Hara-sundarī being herself childless, persuaded her husband to marry another woman, thinking that he would be happy if he had a child by the second wife. But she realised her mistake too late~~late~~, and even after the death of the second wife, the husband and the first wife could not get back their former happiness.

From this story we can understand Rabīndra-nāth's own feeling towards polygamy. He cannot conceive of a happy reunion of a husband and wife, if even for a temporary period her place is taken by a new wife.

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1. For a sketch of the life of Rabīndra-nāth Tagore see pp 40-50
2. First story of KC.

Section III.

"BĀLA VIVĀHA" OR CHILD MARRIAGE.

INTRODUCTION.

Only last year the reformed Legislative Assembly of Delhi, by a majority of non-official Indian votes, rejected the Bill which proposed to make fourteen years the age of consent. We can safely take this vote as reflecting the view of the majority of modern Hindus though a small minority of women is demanding that "the age of consent be raised to eighteen in all cases of offences against the girls." [1] And so far as Bengal is concerned, it has already begun to be the practice for girls of the upper classes, (e.g. Vaidyas and Kāyasthas,) to marry when they are about fourteen; and the marriageable age for Brāhmo girls is higher still.

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1. Extract from the letter sent by the "Women's Indian Association," Adyar, Madras, to the Ministers of the Legislative Council on March 20th 1923.

Child marriages were unknown at the dawn of Hindu Civilization. In the Vedas we find instances of Svayamvara, or the independent choice of a husband by a woman. In the heroic age besides the Svayamvara, we find instances of marriage by mutual consent or capture in addition to the ordinary forms of marriage. The epic heroines were generally married when grown up. Even to-day the "Mantras" which are uttered during the marriage ceremonies direcly show that the bride should be a woman and not an infant at the time of marriage.[1]

It is, however, certain that the child marriage was the general rule during the Smṛti period.[2] It was at this time that the curious but popular belief that without marriage there could be no salvation for a woman, came into existence; and through the Smṛtis made it obligatory on a father to marry his

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1. RKHLC. See also footnote on page 109.
2. We differ on this point from Professor Max Muller, who holds the opposite view in his correspondence with Behramji M.Malabari on 26th October 1886.

daughter before puberty, the only rational explanation for the advocacy of such marriages is that otherwise a girl might yield to temptation.[1] A different view, however, was held by Raghunandan Bhattācārya,[2] who lived in the sixteenth century, and who, down to this day, is regarded amongst Bengali Hindus as the highest authority on their social and religious ceremonies. In his "Jyotiṣ Tattva" a work, prescribing the proper time for all religious rites, he says that for a girl the proper age for the consummation of marriage is sixteen. But this always remained a theory, and it was found in many cases that though Bengali pandits professed to regard Raghunandan as an authority, they were

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1. Even to-day those who support the system of child marriage advocate it as indispensible for the maintenance of the Indian joint-family-system.

2. See page 13.

not aware of this statement of his.[1]

The Smṛiti custom of early marriage, persisted until the nineteenth century. The only exceptions to the rule that all Hindu women marry in their childhood were those Kulīn girls who could not find a husband till late in life and female ascetics who did not marry at all. And even an illiterate Bengali Hindu woman could tell us, citing from the seventh chapter of Parāśara Saṁhitā, that the proper marriageable age for a girl is her eighth year, when she is called the goddess Gaurī; or her ninth year, when she is called Rohinī, i.e., the wife of the god Chandramā;

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or her tenth year, when she is merely a Kanyā or bride. After her tenth year she is an adult. The Viṣṇu Saṁhitā (Chapter XIV) supports the custom saying that an adult unmarried girl is called Bisali and it is a sin to marry

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1. There is a certain section who while admitting that child-marriage is a great curse, question the existence of such a system in the Hindu community. They declare that the "so-called child marriage is nothing but a betrothal", though at the same time they cannot deny that "many abuses have crept in." WP. p. 18.

her. Even in Manu Saṁhitā twelve is fixed as the maximum marriageable age for girls.[1]

There was certainly no minimum age for marriage and amongst the Vaidik Brāhmans the 'Bāgdān' or Betrothal ceremony was often accomplished long before the birth of bride and bridegroom. It was a sort of promise made between the parents that if one had a son and the other a daughter, they should be married. But this ceremony is now obsolete.

It was in the early part of last century that the rationalist teaching of Derozio and the Christian teaching of the British missionaries gave rise to a campaign against

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1. Whatever interpretation we might put on Manu's self contradictary slokas regarding marriage, of one thing we are certain and that is he enjoins a girl to live a celibate life when a suitable husband is not forthcoming, only if for some reason she had already violated the general rule by not marrying before puberty. (See Manusaṁhitā. Bk IX -- 88, 89, 90, and 94.

the institution of child marriage. In 1842 Dr. Duff protested vigorously against the evils of child-marriage and compulsory widowhood.[1]

But the real beginning of the movement for the abolition of child marriage is to be traced to Keśab-candra Sen. On his return from England in 1870 he obtained the opinion of famous physicians concerning the age at which Indian girls ought to be married. Most of the medical men -- both Indian and European -- fixed it at sixteen or even later. Dr. Charles, the greatest surgeon of his time in Calcutta, suggested the fourteenth year as the lowest age.[2] Accordingly a bill was introduced in the Legislative Council fixing fourteen as the minimum age for the marriage of girls. But the opposition from men of all religions was so strong that it could only be passed as a 'Brāhmo' Marriage Act - Act III

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1. LD.(a) p. 6. -(b)See also page 15.

2. " Medical men recommended that the minimum marriageable age of women should be sixteen; and if delayed until the eighteenth year, the danger of child bearing would be lessened and healthier offspring would be secured." -- WI. - p. 61.

of 1872. Both the parties who would take recourse to this Act, must profess that they do not belong to the Christian, the Jewish, the Hindu, the Moslem, the Parsi, the Buddhist, the Sikh or the Jain religion. So though from a legal standpoint Hindus are barred from taking advantage of this Act, practically it became a great gain to them. Many liberal Hindus -- not only of the Brāhmo Samaj but outside it -- began to marry under the Act, which made monogamy compulsory for parties marrying under its provisions, raised no protest against the remarriage of widows, and admitted divorce. It is interesting to note in connection with this Act that before marriage can take place the man must be at least eighteen and the woman fourteen, and if either of the contracting parties is under twenty-one, the consent of the parent must be obtained.

The efforts of Keśab-candra did much to lessen the percentage of child-marriages among Hindus. In 1878 after

the split amongst the Brāhmos on the question of "the Cooch Behar marriage", the advanced section of the Samāj took a vow that they would have nothing to do with marriages where the bridegroom was under twenty-one and the bride under sixteen.[1]

As he failed to put a stop to child marriage in the Hindu community Keśab-candra Sen inaugurated a movement to save girl-wives from possible injuries to health and life due to premature child-bearing. This led to the passing of the Act of 1891, which raises the age of consent from ten to twelve years, -- ten years having been fixed by the government thirty years previously. The orthodox Hindus under the guidance of Śaśadhar Tarkacūrāmaṇi of Bengal and Bāla-gangādhar Tilak of Bombay admitted that premature consummation is a grave sin for a husband; but they objected

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1. AC. p. 242.

to the passing of the bill on religious and social grounds.[1]

Although no further laws have been enacted in that direction, many members of the Hindu social conferences[2] held during the present century have pleaded for the sixteenth year as the minimum marriageable age for a girl and

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1. In his "Essay on Age of Consent Bill and Social Reform", which was published in 1891, Dīna-nāth Gāṅgulī of Hālisahar pointed out that even in Europe, where girls arrive at puberty later than in India, Spain, Greece, Switzerland and Hungary accepted the twefth year as the Age of Consent.

Amongst the distinguished Bengali women who thought that the existing provisions of the penal code sufficed to deal with the crimes referred to, we find the name of Mahārānī Bhawa-Sundarī of Dīghāpatia.

2. Among the socio-religious conferences that seek to purify the Hindu community, the All India "Hindu Mahā Sabhā" is the most representative body. In August this year it held its seventh session at Benares.over which Paṇḍit Madan -mohan Mālavīya presided. A social conference was also held at the same time in Benares under the presidency of the Rājā of Tirwa. He urged the Hindu community amongst other things (i) to abolish the parda, (ii) to educate its girls, and (iii) to raise the age of marriage, and to make it, in the case of boys, between eighteen and twenty-five,and in the case of girls between sixteen and twenty. (Vide - "The Servant" - Calcutta - August 29th 1923.) But the orthodox section was so strong that it absolutely overruled all liberal suggestions.

twenty-five for a boy; and they have wanted to delete the objectionable sentences of the Brāhmo Marriage Act, so that Hindus of all sects might take advantage of the Act.[1]

At present time, however, as a matter of fact the marriageable age of Bengali girls is steadily rising. This improvement is partly due to growing economic pressure, and to the serious effects of the "Pan"-system or the demand of money by the guardian of the bridegroom, and partly to the spread of education and change of outlook.

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1. Vide the resolutions of the National Social Conferences held at Allahabad in 1910.

CHILD MARRIAGE.

Īśvar-candra Gupta.

In the Bengali literature of last century the first reference to the early marriage of girls is found in Īśvar-candra Gupta's poem "Kaulīnya".[2] He tells us that amongst his people a baby who is too young either to walk or talk is often given in marriage to an old man. In the same poem he points out that a Kulīn girl often remains unmarried until very old, when sometimes she is married to "a male child, whose first teeth have not yet been cut."

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1. For a sketch of Īśvar-candra Gupta's life see pages 24-26.
2. See page 67.

Dīna-bandhu Mitra.[1]

In Dīna-bandhu Mitra's "Suradhunī Kāvya" it is pointed out that though a Kulīn might marry as many wives as he liked, no matter how old or infirm he was, there were many girls, who had to remain unmarried throughout their lives. This was partly due to their conscious protest against this system of marriage, which was sure to bring to them a hell on earthN but mainly to the difficulty of getting bridegrooms, who must be as good Kulīns as themselves. The point is that a woman could not marry below herself though a man could. These lifelong virgins were called "Thyākā Meye" or "stickit girls"[2]. The writer refers to Kulīn Brāhmans in the village of Guptipārā, not far from Calcutta, who felt proud that they had in their families unmarried daughters sixty years old.[3]

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1. For a sketch of the life of Dīna-bandhu Mitra see pages 68-69.
2. As in "Stickit minister."
3. Works of Dīna-bandhu Mitra -- Basumatī Edition (1900) p. 687

Bamkim-candra Chatterji[1]

Apart from the Kulins, the Hindu girls of Bengal were as a rule given in marriage before they passed their twelfth year. Bamkim-candra mentions some exceptional cases, though most of his heroines, Bhramar, Rohini, Suryamukhi, Kamal, Indira -- were married when very young.

Rajani's[2] case was exceptional. Her father says that it is very unusual for a girl of seventeen to remain unmarried; and he explains to Hiralal the three obstacles in the way of her marriage. Firstly, Rajani's father is poor - only a flower-seller; secondly, she is blind; and thirdly, she has long passed the usual age for marriage.

The debauchee Hiralal, for his own selfish ends, comes forward to win Rajani's hand, pretending that he wants to reform society and set an example to others by marrying a grown-up girl.

Kunda[3] had also passed the usual age for marriage, for

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1. For a sketch of the life of Bamkim-candra Chatterji see pages 30-31.
2. The hegeine of Bamkim-candra's novel of the same name.
3. See page 32.

she was thirteen. Here also the author gives us an explanation. She was the only support of her father in this world; and the old man could not bear the thought of losing her by giving her in marriage.

Rādhārani was also married late. But her guardian Kāmākhyā Bābu was a man of modern ideas. Moreover Rādhārānī had no relation who would ostracise her because of her late marriage. Kāmākhyā Bābu gave her a sound education, and left it entirely to her to make a marriage of her own choice, when she was grown up.

Rames-candra Datta.[1]

In Rames-candra Datta's "Saṁsār", we find Bindu's mother anxiously searching for a bridegroom for her daughter, although the latter was only nine years old. Bindu's mother approached the leaders of her village, who boasted that they could find her a son-in-law. They further told Bindu's mother that they had arranged a suitable marriage for Kalītārā, a girl

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1. For a sketch of the life of Rames-candra Datta see pages 38-39.

of eight years, with a man of position and wealth, but he had some little drawbacks, namely he was diseased and was forty, and he was also a widower.

After Bindu's marriage, her mother was anxious to get Sudhā, her younger daughter, married. At that time Sudhā was only five years old. Bindu's husband Hem-candra objected very much to this, but finally agreed to arrange for Sudhā's marriage when she reached her tenth or twelfth year. But Sudhā's mother would not agree to this. Like many other women of her race she maintained that the desire of her life would remain unfulfilled, if she could not get Sudhā married before she died. What could Hem-candra do? He had no choice but to consent and arrange for Sudhā's marriage. Two years after Sudhā's marriage, she became a widow.

In the same novel the author, tells us about the proposals for the marriage of Umātārā, a girl of seven. Her mother boasts that because of her husband's social position, numerous proposals were forthcoming for her daughter.

The author suggests that as a rule people were anxious to give their girls away in marriage at a tender age, if this was not done it was generally because economic or social difficulties stood in the way. A girl of a poor family, says Rames-candra, cannot be married very early. The bridegroom's father not only demands money, but he also wants the girl's parents to be of good social standing.

In his "Samāj" when speaking of old Tarinī Bābu's marriage with the nine year old girl Gopa-bālā, Rames-candra tells us that Brahman pandits recommended this marriage on Śāstric grounds, according to which where a girl of nine years is like the goddess Gaurī.[1] Here he refers to the popular idea that in giving a girl of nine years in marriage ine derives the spiritual benefit which Gaurī's father derived in giving her away to the god Siva.

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1. The author has made a mistake here. A girl of eight years — and not nine years — is the goddess Gaurī —Vide page 92.

Śiva-nāth Śāstrī.[1]

From the autobiography of Śiva-nāth Śāstrī, it is clear that not only in novels, but in actual practice infant marriages were ptevalent at least in the first half of last century. He refers to the system of "Kula-Samvandha", under which within a month or two after the birth of a daughter in a Kulīn Vaidic family, she was betrothed to an infant boy of equal Kulīn status. Then when the girl reached the age of eight or nine the marriage was celebrated. According to this custom, says Śiva-nāth, his father's "Kula-Samvandha" was arranged when he was six or seven months old, though the actual marriage took place when he was ten or eleven years of age. The first marriage of Śiva-nāth himself also took place when he was twelve or thirteen, though according to the "Kula" custom, the betrothal ceremony was accomplished when Śiva-nāth was only two years and his bride was only one month old.

In Siva-nath's novel "Yugāntar", Tarkabhuṣaṇ, talking

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1. For a short sketch of Śiva-nāth Śāstrī's life see pages 45-46

to his sister Bijoya, admits that girls as a rule are married before they are ten. But from his "Grha Dharma"[1] we gather that the author's own views are not in accord with this custom. He prefers girls to marry when they are really grown up. He also advises a celibate life for those girls who wish to devote their lives to some great ideal.

Bhudeb-candra Mukherji.[2]

Bhudeb-candra Mukherji is a blind supporter of the system of child marriage.[3] Though he challenges the idea of his opponent that early marriage is "a sort of disease

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1. Page 24.

2. For a short sketch of the life of Bhudeb-candra Mukherji see page 35.

3. "Englishmen are opposed to early marriage. They do not allow for the fact that what suits one country does not suit another. Their fixed idea is this that their own rules and customs are the best, and all other rules and customs are inferior. And so even in India the Englishman wants to establish systems which are suitable only for England." -- BP. p. 104.

peculiar to Hinduism," he could point out only one instance of adult marriages that of the Kṣatriyas who marry their daughters between the age of sixteen and twenty. He frankly admits that from time immemorial the marriageable age for a Hindu girl has on an average never been fixed at more than twelve or thirteen years. He has no hesitation in saying that this practice of the early marriage of girls persisted even under the ancient Brāhmanical and Buddhist systems when men married very late. And he insists that such early marriages of girls are desirable for two reasons.[1]

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1. In answer to Bhudeb-candra's statement we may quote the following extract from the Rev. T.E.Slater:- "Rāma married Sītā; Kriṣṇa married Rukminī; Arjuna married Draupadī; Nala married Damayantī, not as children, but as grown-up women. And as for the Hindu religious books themselves, a careful study of them seems to show that the infant marriages form no part of a religious institution in India." The very mantras that the Smritis prescribe to be chanted during the marriage ceremonies, clearly indicate that the bride should be a woman, and not an infant." Quoted in WI p. 58.

In the first place he believes that the root idea of Bengali home-life is for the entire family to live together; and that early marriage is an inevitable result of this. He takes it for granted that the joint family system must persist, so long as a country remains agricultural; and as a necessary corollary early marriages must continue.

In the second place he maintains that increase of population is a necessary factor of a healthy national life; and this will be threatened if people do not marry at a 'proper age'. And, according to him, the proper marriageable age largely depends on the climatic conditions of the country. As regards India and other hot countries, the author says, it is the law of nature that people must marry early.[1]

Then Bhudeb-candra proceeds to justify his contention in a questionable scientific way, by quoting statistics con-

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1. BP., pp. 102-108.

veniently elected to suit his purpose, regardless of the fact that there is no such thing as a 'marriageable age' definitely and legally fixed for each nation. We quote the following extract from his book, "Sāmājik Prabandha" or "Articles on Social Topics":-

"It seems to me that it is from a natural instinct that the people of different races have fixed marriage at the age most suitable to them. In Norway and Sweden the average duration of life is 42 years, and there the marriageable age is thirty. In England the duration of life is thi ty-five years and the marriageable age is twenty-one. In France the average duration of life is thirty years and the marriageable age is nineteen. In Italy and Greece the average duration of life is twenty-eight years, and the marriageable age is sixteen. In India the average duration of life is twenty-five years and the marriageable age, i.e. when consummation of marriage takes place, is thirteen. So, the rule concerning marriage age of an Indian, has arisen, like the rules of other races, from natural instincts, and is in entire harmony with a true science."[1]

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1. SP. p. 259.

Svāmī Vivekānanda.

Svāmī Vivekānanda's views on child marriage, contrast in a striking way with those of Bhudeb-candra. Like the latter he admits that child marriage is prevalent; but condemns the custom as a great hindrance to progress. He accuses the Hindus of being great sinners because they get their daughters married at the early age of ten or eleven years.[2] He is surprised at the reasoning which allows them to believe that little girls might become corrupt and immoral unless they were married thus early.[3]

Vivekānanda strongly condemns the social system of his country which allows a married girl of twelve to beget a child;[4] and also equally strongly reprimands the parents of a girl, who give their daughters of eight in marriage to a man of thirty. He ridicules the stock-arguments of his people that there is a peculiar sweetness in child marriage, and that

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1. For the sketch of the life of Svāmī Vivekānanda see pp. 53-54.
2. Pat. II. p. 46.
3. Pat. I. p. 47.
4. Pat. III. pp. 111-112.

husband and wife cannot but love each other under this system.[1]

He defends his Moslem neighbours against the allegations that they were the first to introduce child marriage into India. He draws attention to the old Hindu Śāstras, which sanctioned it long before the first Moslems came to India. He refers in support of his contention to the Grihya Sūtras.[2] Further, the author reminds us of the great agitation about the passing of the Age of Consent Bill, with the comment that though the leaders of society ought to have been ashamed that such an important bill had not been passed before, instead of that they held many protest meetings and sent petitions to the government against it. There is no doubt, says Vivekānanda, that many people understood the folly of child marriage. He is sorry that they were not brave enough to act according to their conscience through the fear of social punishment.[3]

Svāmī Vivekānanda agreed with Bhudeb-candra Mukherji that

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1. Pat. I. p. 124.
2. MMB.-VI. p. 286 or Pat. II . p. 102.
3. SSS. p. 82.
4.

that proper adult marriage for girls had never been sanctioned by the Śāstras. But while Bhudeb-candra tries his best to prove from the laws of nature and statistics that in India the twelfth or thirteenth year was the proper age for a girl to marry, Vivekānanda urges that a girl should be given as good a training as a boy, and like a Vedic boy-student of olden days her time of marriage should also be deferred until she has finished her education.[1]

In order to abolish child marriages Vivekānanda advises one of his liberal friends not to say publicly anything against the marriages of very young girls, but only to preach against the marriage of little boys. For, a male child's marriage, says the author, has never been sanctioned in any Hindu scripture. He believed that when marriages of little boys stop, automatically that of little girls will stop also.[2]

Then the author gives us a brief list of the evils consequences of early marriages. An early marriage for a girl may bring premature motherhood, which is detrimental both to her own health and to the health of her offspring. The

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1. Pat. I. p. 46.
2. Pat. II. p. 123.

children of undeveloped parents naturally are undeveloped both in body and mind. These weaklings can do nothing better than increase the number of beggars. The author also tells us that the reason for the existence of so many widows in Bengali Hindu houses is the custom of child-marriage. The fewer child-marriages there are, the less will be the number of widows.[1]

In his "Sārttamān Bhārat" or "Modern India", the author gives us a picture of the struggle between the old and new ideals as regards Hindu marriage. The conservative view is that as marriages are not for individual enjoyment but for the good of society, society has every right to dictate whom one should marry. But the more modern view demands that a person should have entire liberty to marry whom he likes, for, it is on marriage that the happiness and misery of his whole future life depends.[2]

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1. S.S. - p. 83.
2. V.V. - pp. 52-53.

Rabīndra-nāth Tagore.[1]

This modern Indian standpoint is well explained by Rabīndra-nāth Tagore. He admits in his article "Samudra jātrā" that a good many rules of Hindu society are so closely inter-related that the breaking of one means the breaking of many. The author gives an example. If you want to introduce the education of women properly, -- and the author is sure that no earthly power can stop it, -- you cannot help giving up child-marriage. The abolition of child-marriage, the author says further, will gradually lead to liberty of choice in marriage. Again, if such marriages are prevalent, many changes in the social life of Bengal will take place; and the author especially refers to the loosening of the bonds of caste on that account.[2]

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1. For a sketch of the life of Rabīndra-nāth Tagore. see pp. 49-50

2. Vide Sj- p. 14. (The article was written in Bengali Era 1299- which corresponds to 1892).
References of Child-marriage can also be found in CG. pp 69, 88, 130, and 168. and also Bhāratī of Pans - 1305..B.S. (1899A.D. p. 797.

Section IV.

"A B A R O D H P R A T H Ā" OR THE P A R D Ā S Y S T E M.

INTRODUCTION.

It is commonly held by a certain class of Bengali Hindus that the Moslems introduced the pardā system into India. But the argument is historically untenable. We gather from the Mahābhārata, "which includes compositions supposed to range in date between 400 B.C. and 400 A.D."[1] that at least three hundred years before the Moslems invaded Sindh,[2] a kind of female seclusion already existed in Northern India. It is true that in some of the episodes of the Mahābhārata there is evidence that amongst the early Indo-Aryan settlers there

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1. H.I. -- p. 28.

2. 712 A.D.

was no such seclusion.[1] They lived in their forest-homes, and women went freely from one forest to another to meet friends and relations. Savitrī's travels in many forests and in many places of pilgrimage in search of a husband, and her father's and the seer's approval of her wanderings are one of the many ancient instances which support this statement.

The system of seclusion appears to have been gradually introduced after the people had settled down for some generations, cleared the forests and founded towns and villages. In spite of advancing civilization it was still an age of insecurity, when women needed special protection, and when men and nations fought and died on behalf of women. There can be no doubt that the women of the Kuru family of Hastināpur lived under what in modern days might be called the

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1. For some instances of free and heroic women of the Vedic Age see VI. p. 8.

parda system, and probably travelled in closed carriages. Only in exceptional cases did they come out of the parda. When the heroes fell on the battle-field of Kuru-Kṣetra or when Dhṛtarāṣtra was renouncing the world, or in similar exceptional cases we find from the Mahābhārata that women in their grief came out of their houses into the street, -- women, who had never even seen the Sun or the Moorn before, women whose faces had never been exposed even to the eyes of the gods.[1] Even in the Ramayana which in the opinion of scholars assumed its present form long before the completion of the Mahābhārata[2] we read that only in exceptional cases, as at the time of a great calamity or a great rejoicing should women come out of their seclusion.[3]

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1. 10th Chap. Strī Parva and 15th Chap. Asramvas Parva of the Mahābhārata.
2. "The bulk of the Rāmāyana is believed to have been composed before 500 B.C." HI. p. 28.
3. VI. 92. 33. and VI. 116. 28.

When the Mussalman invaders reached India they found therefore something extremely like a parda system already established there. It is probable however, that one result of their coming to India was a considerable increase in the strictness with which the seclusion of women was enforced in both communities — Mussalman and Hindu— with a view to maintain the purity of the race and to give a better security to women amongst a new and strange people.

The ~~Hindu~~ parda system has always been practically confined to Northern India, where more particularly the Aryans settled. The Aryans apparently could not popularise it amongst the unwilling inhabitants of the Deccan, who, though they imbibed the Aryan religion, successfully resisted the inflow of Aryan immigration. The Moslem control of the Deccan was also too short to produce any practical change in this matter. Even to-day in the Deccan the parda system can only be found amongst the Moslems, and the Nāmbudhrī Brāhmans, who are said to have come from the North. The Mahrāttās also for the

most part observe no pardā, though the families of the highest rank amongst them have adopted the practice.

As for Bengal, the practise of the strict seclusion of women is mentioned even in Bengali folk tales, which probably have come down to us from a time long before the country had been influenced by Islam. The prince of many a story had to struggle hard, after riding far on his winged horse, to meet his princess-lover, who in most cases is described as living on the sixth floor of her father's palace, surrounded by big walls and deep ditches.

But the pardā system of Bengal, is only observed in its full strictness amongst the women of the cities, where one does not know who lives next door. In a Bengali village the parda is practically unknown, except in a few select zemindārs' houses. The ghomṭā too is not strictly observed in the villages except amongst young wives, who generally come from distant villages. In a little village where men and women are known to one another from their very birth, it would be absurd and useless to try to enforce strict pardā.

But when women go from one village to another, they do observe the ghomta, and also the parda if they can afford it. Only women of the labouring class, who have to toil hard in the open air, are compelled to appear unveiled everywhere.

In Bengal it was the Brāhmos who definitely began the movement against the seclusion of women. It is said that Kesab-candra Sen[1] and especially his friend Satyendra-nāth Tagore had to re-model the Bengali women's dress a little to fit it for outdoor use. Returning from England in 1870 Kesab-candra founded the Indian Reform Association in Calcutta with a special section called "Female Improvement". Under this section amongst other things Kesab-candra started in 1871 the Bāmā Hitaiṣinī Sabhā or Women's Welfare Club. The Sabha was started inside the parda with Keśab-candra himself as President, and Miss Rādhārānī Lāhirī as Secretary. Kesab-candra's idea was gradually to relax the restriction of the pardā as a preliminary

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1. For a sketch of the life of Keśab-candra Sen see pages 129-129.

to its abolition. In 1872 he also started a boarding house, Bh
Bhārat Aśram, where Brāhmo wives and children could live together
to receive religious and moral training. Here we trace a
first definite step forward, for now women from different parts
of Bengal began to live without much parda restriction.

But the advanced section of Keśab-candra's following did not like this slow process. Their leader Dwārkā-nāth Ganguli started first in Dacca and then in Calcutta a magazine called "Abalā Bandhu" or "The Women's Friend" with the definite object of advocating complete freedom for women. In 1872 they wanted Kesab-candra to allow their women to sit with them outside the parda in the Brāhmo Samāj Temple during the public services. Before Keśab-candra could decide anything, Annadā-caran Khāstagīr and Durgā-mohan Dās began to sit with their women amongst the male part of the congregation. The moderates protested and the extremists left the temple. A few days after Keśab-candra, however, made a place for women in a corner outside the pardā; and gradually many other women followed

the example of the women of the Khāstagīr and Dās families.

The next thing which favoured the freedom of Bengali women was the introduction of higher educational institutions for them. The girls who joined these institutions, after finishing their course, naturally did not wish to retire behind the parda.

The influence of Western culture and education has already freed Brāhmo women from such restrictions; and the parda system is gradually relaxing its hold upon caste Hindus also. For, people have begun to realise that the necessity for the ancient custom of the parda, has long passed away; and that women should no longer be mistrusted or denied the elementary right of personal freedom. The modern feeling is that they should rather be helped to learn how to command respect even when they are out of the parda. Hindus are also realising that the abolition of the parda system will greatly help to do away with the evils of compulsory widowhood, child-marriage and the illiteracy of women.

THE PARDĀ SYSTEM.

Rām-mohan Rāy.[1]

In Rām-mohan Rāy's writings we do not find any direct denunciation of the parda system. But seeing that throughout his life, he fought for women's rights in the spheres of education and public service, we may safely assume that he was not in favour of the seclusion of women.

Īśvar-candra Gupta.[2]

The orthodox poet Īśvar-candra Gupta, in the midst of his unfair criticism of English customs in his poem, "Iṅgrāji Nava Barṣa" or "The English New Year", had admitted that Bengali women suffer terribly throughout their whole life on account of the seclusion of the parda. They are not even

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1. For a sketch of the life of Rām-mohan Rāy see pp. 6-7.
2. For a sketch of the life of Īśvar-candra Gupta see pp. 24-86

allowed to see a stranger's face. And as they remain in darkness, they cannot enjoy the light of happiness. The only consolation the poet finds is that this darkness of seclusion has helped Bengali women to live a pure life. We cannot regard as only a passing sarcasm the poet's call to the women of his land to break through the darkness of the pardā:-

"Where are you, all you "native ladies", O listen to me,
How long will you still live the life of mere animals?"[1]

Hem-candra Banerji.[2]

It is in the writings of Hem-candra Banerji that we find the first frank condemnation of the parda system. The following is a striking statement of his views:-

"Everywhere throughout India you treat your women as lotus-flowers, which you have plucked and taken from the water. You have broken their gentle spirits, disheartened them, and do not allow them to see either earth or sky.

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1. Īśvar-candra Gupta's "Kavitā Sangraha" (Bamkim-candra Edition) p. 73.
2. For a sketch of the life of Hem-candra Banerji see pp. 28-29.

Though they are in the world, they live the life of prisoners".

Then the poet in his customary manner reminds us of that ancient age, when,,—

"In this playhouse came to play Ātreyī, Jānakī, Draupadī, Khanā, Līlāvatī, and Sāvitrī, good women of old time, who made India sacred."

But, laments the poet, — "That day has passed, To-day in India the life of a woman is worse than that of a beast. All the people of India disgrace their race by following inhuman customs and low ways and have become worse than devils."

Then the poet points out to his countrymen the contrast between the free and fearless women of the West and the helpless pardānaśins of the East:-

"Look on the other hand at the happy, gentle, flowerlike European ladies and see how they fearlessly cross the endless ocean.

"Pure in the freedom of youth's morning, they ride without a tremor the forests and valleys and high hills, — angelic in

form, and adored by men, and adorned with ornaments of literature, science and music."

"Will woman's glory once more be proclaimed in India?"-- the poet asks. "Will she regain her honour, assume once more her proper robes, add to her country's knowledge, pride and vigour, and become the mother of generations of heroes?"[1]

In his serio-comic poem, "Bājimāt" or "Checkmate", which was written on the occasion of the Bengali Zenānā ladies' welcome to the Prince of Wales -- whichwas the first time in history when pardānaśins received a foreign male guest, -- the poet ridicules the so-called advanced section of the community, represented by the Tagores, the followers of Keśab-candra Sen, and Vidyāsāgar, letting their women miss the opportunity of greeting the Prince, and allowing the honour to fall to the lot of a certain so-called orthodox family.[2] In his poem Hem-candra Banerji boldly asserts:-

"The twentieth of the month of Paus[3] is an auspicious day

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1. Hem-candra's Granthāvalī -- Basumatī Edition. pp. 346-347.
2. King Edward VII, while Prince of Wales, expressed a wish to see the zenānā during his royal visit to India. Rāy Bāhādur Joyānanda Mukherji, Govt. Pleader of the High Court of Calcutta, invited the Prince to his house in Bhawānīpur.
3. The 20th Paus, corresponds to the 3rd of January 1876. The Prince came to Calcutta on the 23rd December 1875 .

in Bengal, Because on that day the women drew aside the parda and welcomed the Englishman." [1]

Kesab-candra Sen.

Kesab-candra Sen, who raised the Brahmo Samaj, to its highest pinnacle of fame, was born in 1838 in Calcutta. He came of an aristocratic Vaidya family. His father Dewan Ram-Kamal Sen took a prominent part in the social and educational activities of his time. Kesab-candra was a student of the Hindu College, which he left in 1858, and in the succeeding year he obtained an appointment in the Bank of Bengal. Two years later he resigned his post in order to devote his time and energy to the cause of the Brahmo Samaj, which he had joined in 1857. Through his religious fervour and high character he soon became the right hand man of the leader of the Samaj, Maharsi Devendra-nath Thakur (Tagore) ; but gradually he drifted away from the Maharsi on social and

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1. Hem-candra's Granthabali. - Basumati Edition. p. 390.

religious questions. And in 1866 he established a new Samaj, called "Brāhmo Samaj of India", and in 1881 founded the Naba-Bidhān Samāj or the Church of the New Dispensation. The enthusiasm, with which both through his journalistic writings and his preaching he advocated the abolition of caste distinctions, the establishment of inter-caste marriage, and the extension of the rights of women, drew many young men of advanced ideas around him. On the other hand all this new movement frightened Hindu orthodoxy, which formed itself into many new clubs, such as, Dharma Sabhā, Vaiṣṇava Sabhā, Hari Sabhā etc. When the split came over the "Cooch Behar Marriage" in 1878, some of fellow workers deserted Keśab-candra and founded the Sādhāraṇ Samāj. Keśab-candra worked with the temperance movement in England and kept in touch with all the theistic churches of the world. In 1881 Keas-candra introduced a spiritual sisterhood in his Samaj. He also organised many societies and clubs, the most important being the Albert College and Institute, The Indian Reform Association with its five branches, viz, Cheap Literature,

Charity, Female Improvement, Education and Temperance; the Native Ladies Normal School; and the Bāmā Hitaisini Sabha. He started the Bengali weeklies, "Sulabh Samachar" and "Dharma Tattva." The doctrine of Christ made a special appeal to Kesab-candra, and his orations on Christ and Christianity will always be regarded as a striking contribution to the literature on the subject, especially as they came from one who did not belong to any Christian church. Kesab-candra died in 1884.]

Keśab-candra Sen believed that the parda system was a great hindrance to all social progress. His views on the subject are fully given in his sermons preached from the pulpit of the Brāhmo Samaj. His view was that the "Sisterhood of women is really a great social asset to-day." [1] Believing this he created, side by side with the society

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1. BBP.- II. - p. 51.

which he called the Men's Brotherhood, a similar society called the Women's Sisterhood, which became a very important feature of the Church of the Nava Bidhan or New Dispensation of which he was the leader.

He realised that the Kingdom of God "cannot be perfected by men alone. He would fain build up His holy family of Love with the help of both men and women." And as a first step to fulfilling God's purpose in this world, Kesab-candra called on the women of Bengal to come out of seclusion and to take their rightful place in social life. According to him, God has made woman in order that coming into contact with her tender nature, man's heart may be softened; under the influence of that tender quality man will do good to the world. But for the most part man is deprived of this feminine influence through the parda system. [1]

The author further thinks that the abolition of the parda is necessary, not only for the sake of man but also for woman's own sake. Man lives in the outer world, mixes with

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1. BDP. - II. - p. 50.

its people, breathes its free air, and thus his mind is broadened. But from time immemorial woman has been confined within a very small space. She does not realise that there are other places besides her own little house. Her affection towards the inmates of her small home is all the while growing stronger. And gradually kindness, patriotism, and love for the world disappears entirely from her heart. Those seeds of sweet and high thoughts which God Himself sows in her heart, die for want of fit and favourable circumstances in which to grow. This degrades not only woman but also man. Thus many men of charitable disposition lose that quality when they are married. Kebab-candra says :- "that woman is no woman who makes a man hard and selfish."1

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1. BDP. -I. -- pp 4-8.

Bamkim-candra Chatterji.[1]

From Bamkim-candra Chatterji's novel "Bisbrksa", we get some idea of how well-to-do pardanasins observed the parda-system in his day. He relates a conversation between a rich zemindar's wife Sūryamukhī and the family physician. Sūryamukhī was separated from the physician by a "chik";[2] and she was accompanied by a maid-servant through whom she talked to the physician.

Even to-day it is the rule that a pardānasin must always speak with strangers through a third person. When a woman cannot afford a maid she generally speaks through some boy or girl who happens to be near at hand. And this rule applies not only to strict pardanasins but generally also to those who wear the ghomṭā.[3]

The 'ghomṭī' system has much more significance in Bengali life than that of the parda. In many Bengali villages where the pardā is practically unknown except in a few select

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1. For a sketch of the life of Bamkim-candra Chatterji see pp 30-31
2. A screen made of thin bamboo sticks.
3. See page VI

families, the wearing of the ghomta is quite common amongst all classes except the very lowest. In the first chapter of "Bisbriksa", young women are described as keeping their faces covered by the ghomta even while bathing in the river, though older women do not observe such a practice.

Many Bengalis of Bankim-candra's day regarded the desire to modify the parda system, and indeed any desire for social reformation as a kind of disease; and many others treated the subject as of no practical importance. This latter view is expressed by Amarnāth in "Rajanī", when he says:-

"Women are now shut up like cows in cowsheds. Untie the rope and let them go and graze. I have no cow, and further I have nothing to do with other people's cowsheds."

Amarnath had no objection to reform but he was not convinced that any good would result from it, or that it was worth the trouble it involved.

One can understand that decent and reasonable people would find it difficult to become enthusiastic followers of such

pseudo-reformers as two of the characters in "Bisbṛkṣa", Tārācaran, a village schoolmaster, and his patron Devendra Bābu, zemindār of Devīpur.

Tārācaran posing as a reformer greatly puzzled people by asking why they shut their women up in cages, and urged that they should be given freedom. The author says:- "There was a particular reason for his advocating so much liberty for women. There were no women in his house, -- he was still unmarried."

Tārācaran's patron Devendra Bābu made some hypocritical endeavours to reform his village. He started a Brāhmo Samāj with men like Tārācaran as members. He busied himself ostentatiously over the proposals for the foundations of a female school. He took the credit of bringing about some remarriages of widows amongst certain lower-caste people, amongst whom such marriages had always been allowed. He joined with Tārācaran in urging that women should be set

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free from their prison. The slogan of both was —

"Freedom for girls." "In this matter" says the author, "Devendra also had great success; his success was due to his own peculiar interpretation of the word 'freedom'." In other words to him the word "freedom" simply meant licence for himself, rather than true liberty for women.

Many self-styled reformers appeared at that time even in the distant villages of Bengal. They professed the Brāhmo faith and had some social standing, and a smattering of English education. But they used their religious profession their social position and their education to serve their own degraded and selfish ends, which they sought to disguise under the name of "Reformation."[1] When they were found out, the inhabitants of remote villages began to be afraid of the new reformation, and sometimes wondered if Brāhmoism and English education were at the root of all these troubles.

Bankim-candra's own ideal for the women of India appears to be that they should be set free from the restriction of the

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1. See also (a) Sadhabār Ekādasī -- Works of Dīna-bandhu Mitra (1901) pp. 394.
(b) Svarnalatā - by Tārak-nath Ganguli (XIV Edition) —pp. 65-68.

pardā.

The stories of Praphulla, Sāntī Sainli and Jayanti leadus to believe that the author wanted the women of his race to come out of parda and lead a free, open life, which would add to their strength of body and mind. He did not wish woman to be a helpless burden upon man, but would have her learn how to stand by herself and to protect herself against the wickedness of the world.

Rames-candra Datta.[1]

In Rames-candra Datta's "Saṅsār", we find Bindu's mother putting on a big ghomṭā when she goes to meet the elders of the village in connection with Bindu's marriage. Had she lived in a town, however poor she might have been, she could only have come out in a ghomṭā after night-fall or possibly for her bath in the very early morning or for a hurried visit to a temple. For, as has already been said, it is in the towns that the pardā system is most strictly observed.

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1. For a sketch of Rames-candra Datta's life see pp. 38-39.

Rabīndra-nāth Tagore.[1]

In Rabīndra-nāth Tagore's short story "Samapti" or "The End", when the boat of the foreign zemindār is moored by the village ghāt, the author tells us, the ghomṭā fell over the faces of the girls at the ghat right down to their very noses as suddenly as a curtain falls upon the stage.[2]

In 1891 Rabīndra-nāth suggested that since the 'maidan' was for the people in general, women should be allowed to take advantage of it for the improvement of their minds and bodies. He said that he was at a loss to understand why women, simply because they were our mothers and wives, should be deprived of the beauty of the earth and the knowledge of science and hygiene.[3]

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1. For a sketch of the life of Rabīndra-nāth Tagore see pp. 49-50.
2. KC. p. 47.
3. YYD. p. 33.

Śiva-nāth Śāstrī. [1]

On the question of the pardā system there is no doubt that Śiva-nāth Śāstrī held more advanced views than his master Kesab-candra Sen. In Śiva-nāth's "Meja Bau" we get a clear picture of the parda system as it exists in Hindu middle class society in Bengal. Though the book was written in the late eighties, the picture drawn in it, can safely be taken as typical of the conditions prevailing in a good many families in Bengal to-day.

In the first chapter of this novel we find that Prabodh-candra, the second son of Madhu-sudan Chatterji has come back home after a long absence from Calcutta; but his wife Pramadā could not greet him at the moment of his arrival because his mother was present. For according to orthodox Hindu etiquette a wife as a rule does not speak to her husband in the presence of his parents or other senior members of the family. But we understand from Prabodh-candra's talk to

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1. For a sketch of Śiva-nāth Śāstrī's life see pp. 45-46.

Pramadā that the English educated husband has already begun to insist that his wife should disregard this custom.

In the third chapter of the book we find thal all the women folk of Madhusudan's family have been invited to dine at a relation's house. All the men dine together; and all the women do likewise. Not only at a big dinner, but at the ordinary daily meals it is the custom of an orthodox Bengali family that men and women eat separately. In a women's feast it is generally women who serve the meal, as we find from the author's description of the above dinner, if accidentally a man comes to serve the food, the women would cover their face and 'coil themselves up like caterpillars.'

The orthodox custom not only forbids a wife to talk with her husband in the presence of her parents-in-law;[1] but it does not allow her to stand up without drawing her sari over her face before senior relations, especially if

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1. We may here refer to Bankim-candra's comment regarding the observance of the pardā on Brajesvar's visiting Sūgar at her father's place. (Devī Chaudhurānī Book II.--Chap. II.)

they be men. It is only in times of emergency that this custom is departed from; and once it is broken, the people concerned usually do not resume it again. We find an illustration of this in chapter five of the book. Pramadā's father-in-law became seriously ill and she, who was nursing him day and night, forgot her 'ghomṭā' altogether in her anxiety. She was no longer a daughter-in-law, but had become more than a daughter to him. He "was no longer embarassed, nor had she any sense of embarassment towards him. She arranged his dress, gave him food, turned him when he wearied of his position, fanned him and pressed his aching limbs."

It is only the senior male relations before whom a wife must veil herself; there is no such restriction where her husband's younger brothers or even their friends are concerned. Pramadā's conversation and behaviour to her husband's younger brother Prakas and the latter's friend Hari-caran suggest that she regarded them as though they were her own brothers.[1]

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1. Meja Bau. Chaps. IV, XI, and XII.

From chapter twelve of the book we learn that when orthodox Hindu women go out for sight seeing in a big city, they are driven in a carriage, with closed doors so that men in the street cannot see them. These pardānashins have to be contented with what they can see through the venetian blinds. The ladies who accompanied Haricaran to see the views of Calcutta, are told to keep the venetian shutters slightly open; so that they might see outside, without themselves being seen by strangers.[1] Often women do not observe the rule very strictly, and even if they wanted to, the little children who accompany them would never rest until they opened the shutters of the carriage sufficiently wide to enable them to see what is going on outside.

But we see from Siva-nāth's story that the strictness of the parda is already being relaxed, at least in the case of those few women, who, under the influence of Western

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1. This rule is not observed in the holy cities of pilgrimage where women have to observe no pardā.

culture, prefer to earn their own living rather than to beg their maintenance from relations. Bāmā, Prabodh-candra's sister, when calamity deprived the family of their wealth, took up a post as teacher in a Missionary Girls' school through the help of a missionary lady. As a teacher could not keep the strict rules of purda, Bāmā could no longer be regarded a purdā-nasin.

Siva-nāth Sāstrī's last novel "Nayantārā"[1] gives an altogether different picture from the one contained in his "Meja Bau". Those who have an intimate knowledge of Bengal will no doubt agree that even to-day there are few families in Bengal, and fewer still outside the Brāhmo Samāj, who are represented by the family of Kālīpada Rāy, which is more typical of a middle class English family than of a Bengali family.

There is no doubt that even at this time of day any Bengali would be as surprised as Pares, when he saw the

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1. Published in 1899.

wife of Kālīpada Rāy standing on the balcony of her home, quite exposed to the public view. He would have a still greater surprise when he saw Kālīpada's daughter, aged twenty-one, being swung in the swing by her brother in the garden in the full view of passers-bys in the street.

But though this neglect of the rules of pardā would shock an ordinary Hindu Bengali, Kālīpada is a Bengali of a different type. Pares' friend Mahendra tells us that in Kālīpada's opinion a home should be to children the happiest place on earth and that they cannot be happy there if they cannot move about and speak their mind freely without embarassment.

Mohendra tells us that Kālīpada got his idea of women's freedom from Bombay. There Kālīpada lived with his family for a year, and there he found that the Māhrāttā Hindu women did not live in seclusion. He liked this so much that since then he had abolished the parda system in

his own family. It appears that other reasons for the change in this and similar cases were the influence of the old Hindu College of which Kālīpada was once a pupil, his wife's acquaintance with European women in the North-Western parts of India, and the atmosphere created in their home by their sons after returning from England.

Kālīpada's daughters were being trained in music by a male outsider, even when they had passed their 'teens'. In their music-room any stranger, when introduced by a member of a friend of the family, could come and join them. And though unlike the English these non-parda women are only allowed to sit separately from men in a corner in a public meeting, we see them dining with men, receiving male guests of the family, watching football matches and gymnastic displays, competing with men in collecting donations for charitable purposes, and making presentations to people who proved themselves worthy of the medals of the Humane

Societies of England and France.

Apart from his novels, Śiva-nāth Śāstrī has something to say on the parda system, in his booklet called "Gṛha Dharma" or "Home Duties."[1] Here he maintains the necessity of the freedom of women and condemns the parda system. He objects to it in the first place, because he thinks it a great enemy of family happiness. For, as the brightness of a woman's pleasant face drives out the darkness of a house, there should not be any place in it where she cannot go. In the second place, he maintains that this system is not conducive to social morality and purity. He urges that mutual respect is the only sound basis for purity. And this mutual respect is impossible without free social intercourse. Thirdly, the parda system deprives man of the chief joy of family life, viz, the constant companionship and refining influence of women with their simplicity and tender affection. Fourthly, woman's moral instincts are

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1. Pp. 13-21 of the 3rd Edition. Published in 1895.

generally surer and sounder than those of men; and so the society of women helps to keep pure and healthy the moral tone of the community. Śiva-nāth Śāstrī makes a special plea for the association of men and women in public worship.

Svāmī Vivekananda.[1]

After the publication of Śiva-nāth Śāstrī's "Grha Dharma," the letters of Svāmī Vivekānanda are the only important writings which appeared in the nineteenth century on the parda system. In these letters we find the freedom of women advocated with great earnestness. Vivekānanda tells us that there are two great evils in India: one is the oppression of the caste system, and the other is the trampling under foot of women.[2]

He believes that in the period when the Upanisads were composed women were regarded as the equals of men both in private and public life; and that the degradation of

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1. For a sketch of the life of Svāmī Vivekānanda see pp. 53-54.
2. Pat. III. - p. 141.

women in India dates from comparatively recent times.

He draws a striking contrast between the women of India and their sisters in the West. In the West thousands of Lakṣmī-like women flock to the schools and colleges, perform social duties, and move about as freely 'as the birds in the air'. How different are the conditions in his own country where "women cannot safely be allowed to walk in the streets." Vivekānanda proposed to train at least a thousand free Indian women to devote themselves to the service of humanity.[2]

He urged that the pardā system was destroying the moral vitality of Hindu women who, he maintains, have not sufficient independence to develop any character of their own. They are neither moral nor immoral but simply non-moral.[3] Their training and the conditions of their

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1. MME. - V - p. 22.
2. Pat. II. - p. 46' also MME -VI - p. 25'.
3. The Māyāvatī Edition of the works of Svāmī Vivekānanda (Vol. V. - p.22) translates 'Sat Puruṣ' as 'well-educated man. This is absurd. 'Sat' can only mean 'morally good'.

life destroy all power of moral choice. Nothing but freedom can make men or women fit for freedom.[1]

Vivekānanda, however, was not blind to the practical difficulty of the situation. In the first place he was not an advocate of any sudden change in the parda system. He quite realised the moral danger that it involved. Secondly, he urges that reformers should carefully study the conditions under which Western women live their free life, and see how far they can be adopted to Indian circumstances. He would safeguard his country from those ill-informed reformers who want to abolish the parda without caring to import the safeguards which preserve the purity of the women of the West.[2]

Vivekānanda was always opposed to thrusting reforms on an unprepared society. His life long ambition was to bring home to the people of his country the gospel of liberty;

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1. Pat. I. - p. 52.
2. S.V. Sp. WY. - p. 626; also V.V. - p. 56.

to inform them of the noble ideas, that had been developed both inside and outside his country; and thus let them understand their situation in comparison with that of the rest of the world, in order that they might be in a position to decide what reforms they ought to try to carry through.[1]

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1. (a) Pat I. - p. 52.
   (b) SWS. - p. 454.

Section V.

"S T R Ī - Ś I K Ṣ Ā" OR THE E D U C A T I O N OF W O M E N.

INTRODUCTION.

At the beginning of last century literacy was practically unknown amongst Bengali women.[1] The primary obstacle to women's education was their early marriage. Marriage usually took place before their tenth year. This was followed by premature motherhood and life-long confinement under the parda system. In addition, there were the ordinary everyday duties of a married householder. The view that education was quite unnecessary for women, - was held by both the elderly illiterate women and literate

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1. It has of course, to be admitted that in all ages Hindu society has produced brilliant women scholars. But they were merely very rare exceptions tot he general rule.

men under whose authority the newly married girl-wives -- like their husbands -- were placed in their new homes according to the joint family system. Thus when for the first time a Bengali, Rājā Rādhā-kānta Deb, in his famous pamphlet on "Strī Śikṣā" or "The Education of Women" in order to encourage female education cited the examples of some of the most distinguished educated women in the land, he could only mention three names from the previous century, viz, Mahārānī Bhawānī of Nātor, Vidyālaṁkār Haṭī of Benares and Paṇḍitā Śyamāsundarī of Koṭālīpāṛā.

In the above pamphlet the author explained the necessity of women's being taught other things besides house-keeping. He suggested that rich families should keep women teachers, and women of poorer houses should be allowed to attend schools until they were grown up. But the most interesting point in the essay is the author's assertion that neither

in the Veda nor in any of the Smṛti books is there to be found any prohibition of female education.

It has been mentioned that even if the Bengali women of those days were not literate, they were nevertheless not altogether uneducated. It is true that only a few of them could read, but they listened to recitations and readings of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas; they attended Yātrās, a kind of play based on those books, performed by strolling players, Kathakatās or religious dialogues accompanied with songs, and Brata-kathās or mythological stories; and they enjoyed the Kavi, Bhāt, Dhap, Bhāsān, Pāñchalī and various other kinds of rustic plays, songs and ballads celebrating the exploits of heroes of the past; and from all this they got such training as a Bengali woman required to be a good woman and a model housewife.

But there was no girls' school opened for the public until Miss Marshman started one in 1800 at Serampore.[1] She also made arrangements for young lady students.[2]

The first Bengali to work in this direction was Rādhā-kānta Deb. He and Rām-mohan Rāy realised that literacy was the basis of proper education. And while the latter gave himself to vindicating the social rights of women, Rādhā-kānta joined hands with the British people in order to promote the education of the women of his race.

At his suggestion in 1817 the School Society opened a primary school in Calcutta for boys and girls alike. But as this system of co-education did not work well, Rādhā-kānta helped the "Female Juvenile Society" -- composed of the European women teachers in Messrs Lawson and Pearce's

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1. See Periodical Accounts Relative to Baptist Missionary Society. Vol. II (1801). - p. 67.
2. See Periodical Accounts Relative to Baptist Missionary Society. Vol. II (1801). - p. 227.

Seminary -- in 1820 to start a number of primary schools for girls in various parts of Calcutta, including Entally, Jaunbāzār, Sobhābāzār, Śyāmbāzār. Two years later the British and Foreign School Society sent a Miss Cooke, who, with the help of the Church Missionary Society opened ten schools in Calcutta -- the first one being under the patronage of Lady Hastings. Later on under the auspices of Lady Amherst some of the English women in Calcutta formed themselves into the "Bengal Ladies Society," which founded girls' schools in twenty places in Bengal including Calcutta, Serampore, Burdwan, Kalna, Katwa, Krisnagar, Dacca, Bakhargang, Mursidabad, Birbhumand Chittagong. The average attendance on the rolls is said to have been only four hundred and fifty.[1] But slowly and steadily the British Christian Missionaries have carried on their educational work to the present time, though their race and religion have

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1. Rh 117-19.

have in a way hampered their progress.

Side by side with the missionary endeavours secular girls' schools began to grow up. The first one - the Bethune school - was started in 1849 at Calcutta by two illustrious men, Drinkwater Bethune, who was Law member of the Viceroy's Council and the President of the Educational Council, and Pandit Īśvar-candra Vidyāsāgar. It was supported by Maharsi Devendra-nāth Thākur (Tagore), Justice Śambhu-nāth Pandit, Rām-gopāl Ghosh, Pandit Madan-mohan Tarkālaṁkār and others.

After 1854, - when the famous Educational Despatch of the Directors of the East India Company in England reached India, - efforts began to be made for the extension of education amongst the masses in India.[1] Vidyāsāgar as Inspector of Schools, started many girls' schools[2] and

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1. CUC.
2. For some account of the various difficulties which these pioneers had to overcome see Śiva-nāth Śāstrī's description of the establishment of the Majilpur school in 1859. - AC. pp 88-91.

encouraged other people to do the same. In 1854 there were only 288 primary schools for girls in Bengal with 6,869 pupils[1] But in 1916-17 there were 3,362 schools with 214,079 on the roll.[2]

But these figures are practically negligible when we consider the vast number of Bengali girls of school-going age. Besides the ordinary difficulties that one naturally meets in a land where education is not free and compulsory, the main obstacle is the parda system. Being accustomed to this system for generations men have not had the opportunies of learning those elementary principles of respect and chivalry for non-pardā women, which naturally charactise men of the West, and without which it is very difficult for adult girls publicly to attend schools either as students or as teachers.[3] As one cannot expect to abolish the pardā in a day, the only way is to introduce the system of house to

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1. CUC.
2. EI. p. 177.
3. MMI. p. 243.

house teachers, and establish pardā-schools. The British missionaries understood this long ago; and it was the Rev. T. Smith who was the first in India to lead the movement in this direction in Calcutta. His proposal was to give the 'parda' education amongst the upper classes. It was made practical in 1855 when the Rev. J.Fordyce joined Mr Smith. They also got some valuable help from some Bengalis. Very soon, however, the missionary ladies took the work into their own hands, and in 1881 according to the "very incomplete" returns of the Protestant Missionary Census in Bengal 2324 pupils were under instruction.[1] Outside the direct missionary influence Kesab-candra Sen was the first Bengali to start a pardā school for grown-up women in 1871.[2] Since then many indigenous organisations have been established.

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1. WI. p. 47.
2. Some Brāhmos like Dwārkanāth Ganguli did not regard Kesab-candra's methods of female education as sufficiently advanced. So they started the Hindu Mahilā Vidyālay and placed it under the supervision of Miss Ackroyd. (AC. p. 211). Kesab-candra also established the Victoria College for women in Calcutta, but details regarding it are not available." (WI. p. 8).

The most important of them is one started by Dr. Subodh-candra Sen Gupta in Calcutta with branches in many parts of Bengal. The Bengal Government has also bee working in this direction.[1]

From the statistics of 1916-17 we gather that there are fourteen matriculation girls' schools with 3,665 students in Bengal. Of these no less than eleven are conducted by missionary societies. Further there are fifty middle schools with 7,717 pupils. Little progress has been made in medicine, though in Delhi the Lady Hardinge Medical School for Women has been started for the benefit of women from all parts of India.[2] The number of girls in the Calcutta Medical School is 14 and in Calcutta Medical College 19. Besides there are 40 students in the Schools of Art, 540 in Technical and Industrial Schools, 156 in Commercial schools, and 152 in Training schools and colleges. In general education there are 145 women undergraduates and

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1. CUC.
2. CUC.

and three girls' colleges.[1] Moreover some of the most ambitious spirits amongst th women teachers and doctors, anxious to assimilate the best in Western education, are proceeding to Europe and America in order to study the educational and medical systems of those lands.

In journalism, literature, music and art, we find women of whom any country might be justly proud. In the front rank of Bengali journalism we find Svarna-kumārī Devī, Hiranmayī Devī, and Saralā Devī -- editors of the "Bhāratī", one of the best Bengali magazines; Uṣā-bālā Devī, Bana-latā Devī, Līlāvatī Mitra and Sukhatārā Datta -- editors of the "Antahpur"; Sucāru Sen, editor of "Paricārikā"; Prajnāsundarī Devī, editor of the "Punya"; Kumudinī Mitra, Basu and Bāsantī Mitra, -- editors of the "Suprabhāt"; Lāvaṇya-prabhā Sarkar, -- editor of the "Mukul"; Saraju-bālā Datta -- editor of the "Bhārat Mahilā"; Śāntimayī Devī -- editor of the "Gṛihalakṣmī"; Girīndra-mohinī Datta, --

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1. EI. p. 172.

editor of ~~the~~ "Jāhnavī".

No list of first class prose writers would be complete without the names of Svarṇa-kumārī Devī, Nirupamā Devī, Nirmalā-bālā Som, Anurupā Devī, Saila-bālā Ghosh-jāyā, Indirā Devī, Sītā Devī, Śāntā Devī, Amṛdinī Ghosh-jāyā, Saralā-bālā Dāsī, Kāñcan-mālā Devī, Hemlatā Devī, and Sukhalatā Rāo; while in the field of poetry we find the distinguished names of Kāminī Sen-Rāy, Mānkumārī Datta, Girīndra-mohinī Datta, Priyamvadā Devī, Ambuja-sundarī Dās-Gupta and Nagendra-bālā Mustaphī. Amongst the periodicals the best Bengali monthly magazine devoted to Hindu music -- "Ānanda Saṅgīt Patrikā" -- is edited by two women, Prativā Devī and Indira Devī. Amongst the artists of the new Bengal school we may also mention the names of Sukhalatā Rāo and Śāntī Devī. And among the Indians who have made a name for themselves as writers of English poems are two Bengali women, Taru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu.[1]

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1. For some account of the works of modern Bengali women writers see pp.

THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

Rām-mohan Rāy.[1]

In 1819 Rām-mohan Rāy published his "Second Discussion between a Supporter and an Opponent of Saha-maraṇ."[2] In it the author maintained that if opportunity was granted to women, there was no reason to suppose that either in education or in public service would they prove themselves less capable than men.

Rām-mohan thought that men took advantage of woman's comparative bodily weakness to deprive her of her rights. He says:- "Women generally have less bodily strength than men; and so realising that she was weaker than they, men have, from the very beginning, ousted her from those good positions, for which she was naturally fitted, and then they

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1. For a short sketch of the life of Rām-mohan Rāy see pp. 6-7.
2. "Saha-maraṇ" means 'con-cremation' i.e. burning of widows alive on their husbands' funeral pyre.

say that she is naturally unfit for these positions.[1]

So far as woman's intellect is concerned, Rām-mohan Rāy asks his opponent : "At what age have you tested women's intelligence that you so lightly describe her as unintelligent? For it is possible to call a person intelligent only if he is incapable of understanding and appropriating instruction and education when they are provided for him. How can you be sure that a woman is devoid of intellect, when you have imparted to her scarcely any education or knowledge."

Then the writer illustrates his case by citing the examples of those brilliant Hindu women of ancient days, who received a good education. "Līlāvatī, Bhānumatī, the wife of the Rājā of Karṇāt, the wife of Kālidāśa, and the other women, who were given education, all became famous for their all round learning. We find a clear instance of this in the

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1 RB. p. 209.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, where Yājnavalka imparts to his wife Maitreyī very abstruse instruction about the nature of Brahma, and she succeeds in grasping it."

Further Rām-mohan frankly admitted that it was for man's own selfish interest that women were generally debarred from educational pursuits. Man monopolised education in order to keep her un subjection. It was the monopoly of education which gave him the monopoly of public service, with the result that a woman could not even get ordinary justice from a court when her honour was at stake.[1]

Īśvar-candra Gupta.[2]

It is difficult to say what was Īśvar-candra Gupta's opinion on women's education. Many of his poems, contributed to his paper "Prabhākar", were lost long before any of his works were published in book form. In the copies of the "Prabhākar" still extant, we find a notice encouraging the women of Bengal to contribute poems tothat paper.

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1. RB. pp. 209-210.
2. For a sketch of the life of Īśvar-candra Gupta see pp. 24-25.

But on one point we are sure. He certainly did not want the women of Bengal to be educated on English lines. In this matter we can safely take him as representing the view of the orthodox Hindus, who feared that being educated on such lines the girls of the country would be thoroughly de-nationalised and Anglicised. In his poem called "Durbhikṣa" or "Famine", referring to the students of the Bethune school, Īśvar-candra remarks:-

"Formerly girls were very good. They used to be all very devout and religious. It is only Bethune, who has come and ruined them; and now does one find them behaving as before? Now that girls are all snapping their fingers (at the old customs) and taking to books, of course, after learning the A B C, they are sure to dress like English - women, and to talk in the English tongue. In the end they will come to use spoons and forks; and will no more sit on wooden stools to take their meals?" [1].

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1. "Kabitā Saṅgraha" - by Īśvar-candra Gupta (Bankim-candra Edition) pp. 121-122.

Hem-candra Banerji.[1]

Whatever Isvar-candra Gupta's opinion about the Bethune school might be, Hem-candra Banerji, writing about thirty years after the foundation of the school, gladly welcomed it as a sign of progress. His joy knew no bounds when he saw the first women graduates sitting side by side with men in the annual convocation of the Calcutta University. In his poem, composed on that occasion he blessed the women graduates[2] and said:-

"Long and happy may you live.
May your happiness never end.
Who says that the life of a Bengali has no worth?
What a hope you have kindled in my heart.
Who can deny it?
The vessel of joy has been launched on the flood-tide of time.
Oh women of Bengal, blessed are you.
All honour to you."[3]

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1. For a short sketch of the life of Hem-candra Banerji, see p. 28.

2. Candra-mukhi Basu and Kumudini Basu were the first women graduates of the Calcutta University. They passed the B.A. examination from Bethune female school in 1883.

3. Hem-candra's works — Basumati 3rd Edition — p. 382.

Bamkim-candra Chatterji.[1]

In those novels of Bamkim-candra Chatterji which deal with the nineteenth century, we do not find many women who could really be called highly educated, for, he painted the women of his time as he saw them. Generally men were still apathetic to the cause of women. And even those who were in favour, -- as we understand from his article "Prācīnā O Navīnā" or "Women Old and New" -- would advocate the progress of women, only so far as it was required for men's own happiness. They thought that it was only man who formed mankind, and if woman was not educated, the progress of mankind was hindered and the happiness of man lost. But Bamkim-candra held a different opinion. His argument was that as woman forms half of humanity, the advancement of society depends on her being educated, no matter whether she was the cause of men's happiness or unhappiness.

It was only in theeighties of last century that, for the first time, an opportunity was given to the Bengali girls

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1. For a short sketch of the life of Bamkim-candra Chatterji see pp. 30-31.

for collegiate studies.[1] But amongst the educated men, who were in favour of the education of women, the majority did not prefer a University education of the Western type for their daughters. They made private arrangements for teaching the girls at home, though generally by educated women of the West. In order to give a good elementary training they had to postpone the marriage of the girls up to a reasonable age. We find some instances in Bankim-candra's novels. In his "Rādhārānī", we see the heroine's guardian Kāmākhyā Bābu making arrangements to give her a sound education, before her marriage. But Kāmākhyā Bābu had one advantage. Rādhārānī had no relation and so he had not to be afraid of members of her family regarding her as an outcaste.

But in "Bisbrksa" we find a father who cared little for society and educated his daughter Kamal and his daughter-in-law Sūryamukhī. He engaged for them an English teacher, Miss Temple. Sūryamukhī became so enthusiastic about education that later on she persuaded her husband Nagendra to start a girls' school in the village.

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1. The College Department of the Bethune School was opened in 1879.

Bankim-candra in his story of "Kapālkuṇḍalā" tells us of a girl who was stolen in her infancy by pirates who left her in a forest by the Bay of Bengal. There she was brought up by a pretended ascetic, and the only man she met occasionally was a fatherly old priest. At the age of sixteen when she was told that her marriage was arranged with Nanda-kumar, she was amazed. For as yet she did not understand what the word "Bibāha" (marriage) meant. Nandakumar took her home and tried to make her a woman of the world. But Kapālkuṇḍalā never felt at home there. She never understood what married love was. She was prepared to hand over her husband to his first wife, Mati Bibi, who had been deserted on account of caste scruples. She would never bind herself by social rules, which had little value to her. She sometimes wondered why, because of her not caring for these rules, her husband felt so unhappy. Their marriage was not a happy one. At the end of her life Kapālkuṇḍalā came to the sad conclusion that marriage simply meant woman's servitude to man.

From Kapalkundala we pass on to Śānti in "Ānanda Maṭh" or "The Monastery of Bliss." The motherless Śānti was brought

up by her old father, together with his boy-students. As there was no woman in the house, she imitated the boys in habits and dress, and passed successfully through the school course. When her father died, one of his students, Jībā-nanda, married her. In his home Śānti felt embarassed as she could not change her manly habits. She was habitually rebuked by her parents-in-law, and one day she left home, disguised herself as a boy and joined her husband as a member of the "Santāns", a society of ascetics, who had rebelled against the degenerated Mussulman rule of the time, and were trying to form a kingdom of righteousness. There she learnt all the tactics of war and accompanied her husband, herself remaining strictly an ascetic. When it was discovered that she was a woman, the leader of the "Santāns" warned her that through her companionship her husband might break the vow of asceticism. She was told further that a woman was only a companion to her husband at home and not in the the battlefield. Śānti resented the argument, and proved herself a worthy companion of her husband both in the monastery and in the field. When the campaign was over,

Śānti with her husband, retired to the Himalayas as hermits. It is evident that the author intended us to regard Śānti as coming into the world only to perform a particular mission; we must not take her as Bankim-candra's ideal of womanhood.

We may take the description of Ramā in "Sītārām Rāy" as Bankim-candra's picture of a typical Bengali wife. She was intellectually dull, half-educated, soft-hearted, and simple-minded. She could not understand the intricacies of the world, and she was not trained in anything outside her household duties. When the Mussulman invaders were at the gate, the first thought that came to her affectionate heart was that they would kill her husband and son. She begged her husband to go to the invaders' camp and ask pardon. But when he told her that he had not committed any crime against them, Ramā could not understand; for, she had no knowledge of politics or worldly affairs. Her motherly innocent heart saw no harm in her private interview with Gangārām, the vile mayor of the city, to discuss with him the project of purchasing her child's safety at the price of the kingdom. If Ramā had been

properly educated as a companion of her husband, she would have understood the dignity of her own position and we should have found in her a combination of love and duty.

Ramī's 'satīn' Śrī fails in her duty too. She trained herself as an ascetic though inwardly her mind was always worldly. She could not tear herself away from her husband Sītaram. She came back to him, not as a wife, but as a Sannyāsinī. Sītārām's longing to get her back as his wife became gradually greater and greater and at last it ruined his good name, his family, his kingdom and himself. Śrī realised her mistake, but it was too late. The author comes to the conclusion that the Hindu Śāstras are right when they say that a married person ought not to become an ascetic, because this will spell disaster.

Bankim-candra was not, however, opposed to the idea of woen ascetics. His idea was to train a few women of good character as ascetics who would preach religion, give education, and help distressed people, particularly of their own sex. We find such a character in Jayantī in his "Sītārām Ray."

She was well-educated intellectually, morally and spiritually. Wherever people were in trouble, Jayantī was ready to help them like a benign goddess.

But naturally Bankim-candra did not want all women to become Jayantīs. His ideal woman was Praphulla in "Devī-caudhurānī." She left home early in life keeping alive in her heart all the time her deep affection for her husband; and became a disciple of Bhavanī Thākur, the warrior-pandit. There Praphulla first learned to read Bengali and studied Sanskrit, Hindu philosophy and especially the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā. She was taught to realise and practise the motto of the Gītā that one should do his duty without caring for gain or loss, happiness or adversity. She received such a physical training that she could defeat any wrestler who came in her way. She was trained in practical politics too. She could lead an army to battle, and manage an estate. After completing all this education, she came back to her husband. There she proved herself an ideal woman. A little learning may be dangerous; but the deep learning which Praphulla got,

helped her considerably in every department of her life. Praphulla realised that her household duty was the most difficult of the "Yogas", and the most important of all good deeds. To her it was the ideal "~~Sanyāsa~~" San-nyāsa"

Rameś-candra Datta.[1]

Rameś-candra Datta's social novel, "Saṁsār," gives us ~~a~~ the ideal that at the time of publishing the book the majority of the Hindus meant by a girl's education only the knowledge of house-keeping, the capacity to scribble letters and read such books as the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahā-bhārata and the Purāṇas. But even then cases were not very rare, where the girls were given away in marriage before they began to learn their alphabet. Rameś-candra illustrated this ~~by~~ in the case of Sudhā, whose mother married her at the age of five, inspite of the vehement opposition of Hem-candra, Sudhā's brother-in-law, who wanted to teach

1. For a sketch of the life of Rameś-candra Datta see pp 38-39

Sudhā to read a little Bengali before her marriage.

The same author, however, assures us through Ramanī Bābu, a reformer in the novel, "Samāj", that at the end of last century, society as a whole had made some progress in female education. Ramanī Bābu like many other modern reformers seems to re-read the old Śāstras in a new light and wants to modify the form of society according to up-to-date requirements. In his argument with the orthodox pandits about the validity of inter-caste marriages, he points out that the reason why society had not progressed was the selfishness of Brāhman pandits, who were the custodians of Śāstric knowledge. But now that the people have come to understand the motive of the pandits, they have themselves begun to reform society according to their own religious conviction. They were "giving up polygamy and child marriage, educating women and re-marrying child-widows."[1]

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1. p. 187.

Śiva-nāth Śāstrī.[1]

From Śiva-nāth Śāstrī's autobiography we get a glimpse of education amongst the comparatively elder women of his village about 1850 and 1860. We shall not be very incorrect, we suppose, if we take this description as true for the whole of Bengal at that period. Śiva-nāth says that in his boyhood his mother was the only educated woman in the village, and her favourite books were "Annadā Maṅgal," and the Bengali versions of the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Romeo and Juliet. At noon when Bengali women take a rest for a few hours from their household duties Śiva-nāth's mother utilised the time in reading and writing. She used to help Śiva-nāth in his studies, so that he always did better than his class-mates in school. He tells us that when his class-mates understood that the reason of this was the help he got from his mother, they began to disturb their mothers. But what could they do? The mothers began to say, -- "Good gracious. Do I know reading

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1. For a short sketch of the life of Śiva-nāth Śāstrī see pages 45-46.

and writing? Śiva's mother is creating a nuisance - I see."

It was at this time that little Hindu girls in Calcutta had just begun to attend the Bethune school, but throughout the rest of the country it was only in exceptional cases that women were taught to read and write. They were usually helped by people who were directly or indirectly connected with the liberal schools of thought in Calcutta. Śiva-nāth's mother herself was taught by her husband, who was a student of the Calcutta Sanskrit College and was a favourite of Īśvar-candra Vidyāsāgar and Madan-mohan Tarkālaṁkār, who were then the champions of women's education.

In the eighties too a woman had to suffer much from the members of her own sex, and specially from the women of her own house, if she had any inclination towards learning. Women in general little understood the value of education, and thought it a waste of time and energy, which could be more profitably devoted to performing domestic duties. In his novel, "Meja Bau" or "Second Daughter-in-law," Śiva-nāth pointed out that though Pramadā always did her household work to the best of her ability, she had to endure much ridicule

and oppression in her father-in-law's house, because "she had a special liking for study." But when her husband got an appointment in the town, she got more leisure to study herself and could also help other women, who cared to come to her.

We find in Śiva-nāth's later novel, "Yugāntar" or "The New Age," that these ideas of women's education were infused into the hearts of Bengal through the students of the Hindu College, who started a debating society and enthusiastically spoke about "the necessity of women's education, the harmfulness of child-marriage, the ugliness of caste distinctions and other such matters."

The conversation between Bijoyā, a widow of one of the scholars of the Hindu College, and her brother Tarkabhuṣan, a learned and orthodox pandit on the question of educating her daughter, gives us an interesting description of the two opposing views. Bijoyā, trained as she was by her husband, and having promised him before his death that she would educate their daughter, was anxious to keep her word. Tarkabhuṣan did not like his sister's anxiety for her child's

education. He argued that it was immaterial whether one sent a girl to school since she would have to be married before she was ten. He maintained further that society was going on quite smoothly though women were generally uneducated. But Bijoyā reminded her brother that the Śāstras did not prohibit women's education, and that in ancient times Hindu women received education and held discussions with learned men. While admitting this, Tarkabhuṣan did not see any necessity for reviving this ancient custom.

In Śiva-nāth's last novel, "Nayantārā," we have a different atmosphere. There we get the picture of a family of advanced views. From that book we gather that at the end of last century in at least some modern families, women got a decent education according to European standards, without becoming Anglicised. In the first chapter of the book we meet a father, Kālīpada Rāy, who laid equal emphasis on the education of his sons and daughters. He appointed a learned paṇḍit, a University graduate, and a Moslem musician to teach his daughters Sanskrit, English literature, science and music. Amongst the books of Nayantārā, the eldest daughter of the

1. For a short account of [illegible] see Tagore [illegible] pages 44-50.

family, we find Darwin's Origin of Species, the Works of Shelley, Raghubaṁśam, Pāṇini, Bhāravi, and Śrīmad Bhagavata. She did not marry, and spent her old age in study, and also in starting and helping educational institutions, especially for women.

Rabindra-nāth Tagore.[1]

In his "Yurop Yātrīr Dāyārī" or "The Diary of a Pilgrim to Europe," Rabindra-nāth Tagore gives us some idea of women's education during last century. He refers to the suggestion that women needed no education, since household management required no high training, the science of chemistry was not indespensible in cooking, and great brains were no help in bearing children. But the author argues that the routine work of a woman's life is not the only thing to be considered. The higher a woman ascends above the ordinary business of life, the loftier the type of humanity which would evolve. A woman is not only a wife and a mother, but a woman also. So "affection, love and skilfulness in household duties only are

1. For a short sketch of the life of Rabindra-nāth Tagore see pages 49-50.

not alone enough for a woman. For the fulfilment of her womanhood she requires the education of her mind."

The author then criticises the current objections to the education of women. He says that some maintain that once a woman acquires a taste for history and literature she can no longer have any love for her own child, and that the loveliness of her character will not remain if she suddenly discovers that the old earth does not rest on the serpent Bāsukī, but rotates round the sun.

But he points out that experience has proved that these allegations are imaginary and baseless. And while maintaining that a woman must always be a woman, and that there is no magic power in education to change her into a man, Rabindra-nath urges that "an educated woman nurses her dear ones at the time of illness as devotedly and as carefully as her ignorant sisters."[1]

A very important argument that Rabīndra-nāth puts forward in favour of giving equal education to men and women is that if women's education is not brought up-to-date, the harmony

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1. YYD. pp. 31-34.

between husband and wife will be lost in modern cultured society. Further English education had already begun to create a great gulf between the Bengali brides who do not know English and the Bengali bridegrooms who know the language. Even if only to save society from the tragedy often resulting from this state of things, women's education should gradually become general.

In Rabīndra-nāth's short story, "Khātā" or "The Note Book," we find the husband Pyārī-mohon becoming very anxious when he discovers his wife's devotion to study. He is confident that this will mean that novels and dramas will be imported into the house; and it will be difficult for her to perform her household duties. Thus one day he ridicules his wife, saying:- "I see, I must order a lawyer's wig and my wife will go to the office with a pen behind her ear." This writer also refers to a popular superstition of that time, which was to the effect that if a girl was educated she became a widow.[1]

On the other hand we observe that there were Hindu families,

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1. CG. pp. 73-74.

which, though not professing the Brāhmo faith, were quite up-to-date about women's education. In Rabīndra-nāth's "Chira-kumār Sabhā," or "Life-long Celibates' Club," the girls are not only equal to men in education, but are equally daring and clever and ready to compete with men in any sphere.

Svāmī Vivekānanda.[1]

In 1897 in the course of one of his conversations[2] with his disciple Sarat-candra Cakravartī, Vivekānanda Svāmī gave a lamentable description of the education of Bengali women, of whom, he believed, not even one per cent was educated. He found no real endeavour on the part of men to advance the progress of the women, "who share all your happiness and misery, and who lay down their lives to save you in your homes."[3] The author believed also that one of the chief reasons of his country's degradation was that

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1. For a sketch of the life of Svāmī Vivekānanda see pp 53-54.
2. SSS. pp. 73-83.
3. MME. -VI - p. 443.

its women were not educated.

Once women were educated, the author maintained, they would realise their position and strive hard to improve it. They themselves would resist such abuses as child-marriage, and compulsory widowhood. He would "not pull down or set up anything in society by coercion;" [1] but educate women so that they themselves might deal with the abuses from which they suffered.

He wanted to impart such education, as would produce great and fearless, pure and selfless women -- women like Saṅgha Mitrā, the religious preacher; Līlā, the scholar; Ahalyā Bāī, the warrior; Mīrā Bāī, the devotee; and Sītā, the ideal wife. He was sure that girls' schools which were exact copies of Western schools would not bear such fruit as he wanted. Neither did he wholly approve the Mahākālī Pāṭhśālā of Calcutta, which was supposed to train girls in the pure Hindu system. Commenting on this institution, he said: "But only teaching rites of worship won't do; their education must be an eye-opener in all matters." [2]

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1. MME. VI. p. 448.
2. MME. VI. p. 449.

And therefore he proposed a new system. It is a sort of ancient monastic system, modified to suit the modern requirements of the country, and based on modern scientific principles. Educational centres are to be started in different parts of the country, where Brahmacārinīs of education and character should take up the task of teaching girls. In these institutions "the duties of home life and the principles that make for the development of an ideal character, have to be taught with the help of modern science, and the female students must be trained in the ethical and spiritual life."[1] The author recommended religion, history, the Puranas, arts science, housekeeping, cooking, sewing and hygiene as the subjects to be studied.

A very important suggestion made by Vivekānanda was to replace men teachers by women teachers, especially educated widows and Brahmacārinīs, in women's schools, as women were naturally fit to understand the natural aptitude of women students.[2]

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1. MME. - VI - p. 444.
2. We can realise the country's progresswhen we remember that only thirty years before this Miss Mary Carpenter had to make a similar suggestion, but the country was then too conservative to accept it.

Section VI.

M O D E R N W O M E N W R I T E R S.

How completely the conditions of life have changed for the women of Bengal during the nineteenth century, is perhaps shown most convincingly by the existence at the present time of a large body of Bengali women writers. In this concluding section some account of the most notable of these women is given and their attitude to women's problems is briefly illustrated by references to their works.

Indirā Devī.

Indirā Devī is a member of the famous Tagore family ~~and comes to our mind first~~. Her autobiography known as "Amār Khātā" or "My Note Book" was published in 1912. In it she tells us that in her girlhood her little girl friends used to play the game of "wives" with big "ghomṭā" drawn over their faces. The authoress was also acquainted with the bigamous marriage of the King of Bengali folk-tales, who had two queens, 'Suyo' and 'Duyp'. Her mother was given in marriage when only nine. But times have

changed; and Indirā Devī's parents postponed her own marriage until she was over thirteen. Moreover her prospective husband himself came to see and approve of her; - an unusual custom in Hindu society in those days. At this time she had a good knowledge of Bengali. She could understand "Meghnād Badh". And she knew a little Sanskrit too.

Indirā Devī has also published another book called called "Nirmālya", or "Flower Offerings". It is a collection of short stories. In the first story, "Khātā" or "The Note Book," we find Līlā's father marrying her at ten. The authoress admits that the community did not consider Līlā's age as the maximum age for marriage, but her wise father felt he could not lose the opportunity of giving her away to a widower, who would demand a smaller money gift than a bachelor bridegroom.

From the latter part of last century, this new custom of "Pan-Pratha" or the payment of a money gift to the prospective son-in-law has become quite firmly established in the Bengali Hindu community. And this fact combined with the compulsory marriage for girls has made parents

dread the birth of daughters, and in most of the families even little girls themselves are made to feel this dread.[1] At the age of eight the little Sephālikā, a character in the same book ("Nirmālya") felt it so much that she used to pray to God to save her from marriage, and thus relieve her poor father.[2]

Sephālikā remained unmarried until she was sixteen, when

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1. The protest of the marriageable girls themselves reached its climax when, in order to relieve her poor parents from the oppresion of the 'pan'-system, Snehalatā, a Bengali girl, soaking her clothes with kerosine oil burnt herself to death before her marriage took place. Some other Bengali girls also followed her example for the same purpose.
In the present year (1923) certain Bengali youths in Calcutta have formed the "Students' Anti-Dowry Association." It seems to have achieved some measure of success, though it must be admitted that previous to this, association after association was formed, but most of the boys yielded to the compulsory dowry system att he time of their marriage under threats from their guardians; this was due primarily to the fact that Bengali boys are generally married before they are economically independent.
2. In this connection one may also refer to Rabindra-nāth's short story, "Denā Paonā," in his "Galpa Guchchha" written in 1904.

she was given in marriage to a widower with a child. As she was motherless, her step-mother and father were not prepared to spend a single halfpenny on her marriage. In cases like this, the authoress tells us, the guardians of the girl wait till they hear that an elderly man has lost his wife, and wants another one to look after his children.

In Indirā Devī's writings we find another reason why a few Bengali fathers nowadays marry their daughters comparatively late. The father chooses a boy as a husband for his daughter, takes a promise of marriage from him, and waits till his student career is finished; but the boy does not always keep his promise. We find Bipin Bābu, a character in the novel "Nirmālya", keeping his daughter Mṛṇmayī unmarried inspite of the protest of his community, in the hope that when Manīndra came back from England, he would keep his promise and marry Mṛṇmayī. But in England Manīndra fell in love with Animā and married her.

The same writer also shows us an endeavour on the part of the modernised father to bridge the gulf between his

daughter and her husband in respect of education. Bipin Bābu gave Mṛṇmayī a good education while Manīndra was in England, in order that the latter might find in his future wife, one who was intellectually fitted to become a real companion to him.

In the story of "Bilāt Pherat" or "Returned from England" in Indirā Devī's book of short stories "Ketakī," published in 1915, we find an Anglicised Bengali father appointing an English teacher, Mrs Connelly, to give his daughter Praphulla a good education while her husband Sudhīr was in England preparing for his I.C.S. Examination.

Nirupamā Devī.

Nirupamā Devī's first novel "Annapūrṇār Mandir" or "The Temple of Annapūrṇā" came out in book form in 1913. In this book we meet two girl friends Kamalā and Satī. Kamala was thirteen years old and beautiful. She was also a rich man's daughter. She was a great reader of modern novels and was much affected by them. She had always cherished the wish to marry Viswanāth, who had once saved

her from drowning. But her parents married her to a wealthy debauchee and her life became a hell on earth.

On the other hand Satī's father was too poor to arrange a good marriage for her. But society began to oppress the old man so much because he had an unmarried daughter of fourteen in the house that he mortgaged his little home, the only property he had, and got her married to Tinkarī Lāhirī. To this man marriage was nothing but a trade to earn money. Whenever he found any man opptessed by society for not marrying his grown up daughter, this noble and disinterested man, who had one foot in the grave, at once offered himself as a bridegroom in order to save the old man's caste and family pride. Like Satī's father many Bengali parents had to say in their death agony: "I sacrificed my child, but I was helpless." Satī soon became a widow, though she had never once been invited to her husband's home during his life time.

Satī had a younger sister Sāvitrī. But though some kind-hearted women said that it was better for Sāvitrī to remain unmarried and enjoy mental tranquility and thus avoid the pitiable condition of her sister, the leading women in the community vehemently protested. They maintained that

what had to be would be, and no one could go against her own fate. A marriage was arranged for Sāvitrī, and the noble-hearted Viswanāth, for various reasons which we need not enumerate here, came forward to meet the demand of the guardians of the bridegroom; but at the eleventh hour they pressed for more money, which Viswanath refused and then he himself married Sāvitrī.

In 1915 Nirupamā Devī published her famous novel "Didi." Amongst the modern books that seek to justify polygamy or rather bigamy, "Didi" is unquestionably the best. It has an added interest too, as the production of an educated woman.

Hara-nāth Bābu, a big zemindar of Mānikganj, got his son Amarnath, a student of Calcutta Medical College, married to a grown-up girl Suramā. As generally happens in orthodox Hindu marriages, Amarnāth had never before heard of the girl. Just after his marriage he had to hurry back to Calcutta, and the husband and wife had no opportunity of getting to know each other. Before his marriage took place he had had some acquaintance with a girl named Chāru and her widowed mother in a distant village where Amarnāth sometimes used to go for a holiday. They were very poor and Amarnāth promised

to search for a bridegroom for Cāru. But her mother misunderstood and thought Amarnāth himself intended to marry her. So just before her death she sent for Amarnāth, offered Cāru to him, and died before he could tell her that he was no longer a bachelor.

Cāru had no friend or relation in the village. Amarnāth took her to his Calcutta house and there they fell in love with each other. It was because of his love for her that Amarnāth determined to marry her, though he tried to deceive himself with the thought that he was only doing his duty to the departed mother of Cāru. Thus when his old father anticipating family scandal because of his son's prospective bigamous marriage, and thinking of the sad future of Suramā, Amarnāth's wife, threatened to disown Amarnāth, the latter defied his father and married Cāru. He thought he was only responding to the call of duty and thus he could not help it if the community took it as a crime and if his father and wife were hurt. On the eve of the marriage Amarnāth met Suramā - who was quite a stranger to him, - and asked her permission. But she pointed out the futility of asking her as he had already resolved on the marriage; and began to prepare herself to live a

life of selflessness.

When his father was dying Amarnāth came back home with Chāru. The affectionate father forgave the son, asked Suramā if she could also forgive him some day, and begged her to treat Chāru as a little sister. But Chāru proved herself more than a sister to Suramā. In everything she resigned herself so entirely to Suramā that the latter could not but love her. Surama tried to forget that she was ever married and to think of Amarnāth as the husband of her little sister Chāru. But one day when Amarnāth asked Suramā's forgiveness and wanted her to treat him asher husband, she, for a moment, lost that respect for him as a man of character, which she had held for so long because of his sincere love for Chāru.

Amarnath's words so disturbed Suramā's mind that she left her husband's home to seek happiness in her father's house. But gradually her mind changed. She came to realise that a woman had nothing to live for but her husband's love. So she came back, and this time not as a sister to Chāru, but as her rival in her husband's affection. But Chāru, who had always been trying to reconcile Suramā and Amarnāth, gladly

welcomed her on her return though she came as a rival.

In 1919 Nirupama Devī published her novel "Syāmalī" or "The Dark Girl." It is a story of a deaf and dumb girl. Syāmalī had a younger sister called "Vijalī" or "The Lightning." Syāmalī's father knew that it was practically impossible to get a husband for Syāmalī. But as society would boycott him if he got his younger daughter married, while the elder remained unmarried, he planned to get rid of this difficulty. He thought he would arrange a formal marriage of Syāmalī with Vijalī's bridegroom-elect before his marriage with Vijalī. And thus he would avoid social punishment and at the same time as Syāmalī would always remain with him, the evils of polygamy would not touch Vijalī and her husband. Accordingly the father married Syāmalī to Anilcandra, a wealthy young man, and as the bride and bridegroom do not as a rule meet each other before the marriage, Anilcandra at first did not understand the situation. But when he was told, he refused to marry Vijalī as he was vehemently against a bigamous marriage, and assured her father that he accepted the deaf and dumb Syāmalī as a blessing from God.

Curiously enough while the Hindu community does not object to a bigamous marriage, it is very difficult to get a husband for a Hindu girl who has already been betrothed to another. It is practically impossible to get a girl married if a previous proposal of marriage has fallen through after certain preliminary ceremonies have taken place. This was the case with Vijoli when at the eleventh hour Anilcandra refused to take her as a second wife. Anilcandra understood the situation and got Vijolī married to his friend Sisir-candra. Sisir-candra pressed Anilcandra to marry again, and Syāmalī's mother also suggested the same thing to him.

The authoress points out that in the Hindu community the acceptance of a wife is not based on mutual love, but only on the utterance of certain words. So according to Hindu ideas it would not have been right for Anilcandra to leave Syamalī. Further if the husband has the right to divorce his wife, the latter must possess the same right. But in the Hindu community, says Anilcandra, the wife must always recognise her husband though she might not have any claim whatsoever on him. Nirupamā Devī points out that it is sheer injustice on the part of a community to permit a

man to take a second wife in the lifetime of the first, while a wife is not allowed a second husband even when the first is dead. Anilcandra believes that the Śāstras sanction divorce both for a husband and a wife, if one is impotent, degraded, invalid or blind, but that it is tyranny on the part of the community to allow a husband to leave a wife suffering from the above defects, though it never permits a wife to leave her husband in any case.

However, later in life, Anilcandra met an intellectual girl Rebā. Gradually a sort of affection grew between them, and she accepted Anilcandra's proposal to marry him, believing that Śyāmalī was practically as good as dead. But just before the marriage took place Rebā found out that Śyāmalī loved her husband and tried to keep his affection as jealously as any other woman might. So Rebā, selfless as she was, stepped aside and went back in the Himalayas to live with her ascetic father.

In this novel we do not find any instance of child marriage. Śyāmalī had long passed the marriageable age before she married, so also had her sister Vijalī. But this was of course because Śyāmalī was deaf and dumb. When

Anilcandra first met Rebā, she was a maiden of eighteen. The authoress explains why she had not been married earlier. Her parents lived in North West India. From there it was not very easy for the poor parents to arrange marriages in distant Bengal. They went to Bengal and got their first daughter married. After the marriage and before their return to the North West it came out that the bridegroom belonged to an outcaste family, and the cruel leaders of their community informed them that they would have henceforth no connection with them. The parents were naturally very distracted. Just as they were about to leave for the North West they heard that their married daughter had died of cholera. But the parents understood that she had really committed suicide, in order to relieve them from social ostracism and to make it possible for them to arrange for her younger sister Rebā's marriage. The leaders of their caste withdrew their sentence of ostracism and promised to search for a bridegroom for Rebā. But the grieved family did not care to stay and left Bengal for ever.

Anurupā Devī.

In 1915 Anurupā Devī published her novel "Jyotiḥ-hārā." The heroine of the story Animā loved Jāminī-prakāś but could not marry him, and so devoted her life to social service. In the form of a novel the writer presents the gospels of the different creeds of neo-Hinduism; and tries to set her people against marriages between the Hindus and the British.

Animā is a very rare specimen of intellectual Bengali womanhood. Her father, Acal-kṛṣṇa Datta, a retired judge, was one of those Bengalis, who praised everything English and despised everything Indian. He taught her English thoroughly and never cared much for Bengali. But while studying English literature, the thought of English people's love for their literature and their country deepened in her the love of India and its literature. Her father also trained her in the philosophies of Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley and Comte. She followed her father in renouncing belief in God. Jāminī-prakāś or Prakāś as he was called by his relatives, and his father were very religious Brāhmos. Acal-kṛṣṇa proposed that the marriage be performed according to the Indian Civil Marriage Act. But the other party could

not agree to such a Godless bond and for this reason the marriage did not take place, though the boy and girl remained good friends all the time.

Prakāś married Susaṅgatā, but he could not be happy with her, and she died five years later. She was a woman who cared more for dress and jewellery than for her husband. Moreover she was not sufficiently educated to write a letter correctly. Once she boastfully told her husband that her grandfather always used to say that if a woman became educated she lost her husband. Her father also did not urge her to study much, and she had only sufficient education to talk a little about the weather and to read one or two novels; this she thought was sufficient knowledge to get admittance to the Calcutta Brāhmo Samāj to which her father, nominally, belonged.

When after his retirement from government service Achal- came to settle at the native town of Hugli, Animā had already passed what Hindus would regard as the marriageable age. Her name had been printed in the newspapers, and she had become the subject of village gossip, - she, who was trained in half 'English and half Bengali fashion,' played on the piano, wore her 'sāṛī' in the latest fashion, and walked

publicly with her father. But when her marriage engagement was broken off and people came to realise that she intended to remain unmarried, her more orthodox neighbours were scandalised. When she re-exavated the village tanks so that people might get good drinking water, many poor women came to see and bless her, but they frankly admitted that with all her great qualities, she had a great fault; she was still unmarried at such a late age. Further the friendship of Arimī and Prakāś gave rise to scandal, not only in the Hindu but also in the Brāhmo community.

The authoress makes it plain that people born and brought under the parda system find it impossible or at least difficult respect women who engage freely and publicly in social activities. On the occasion of the thirteenth annual sitting of the "Hitasādhinī Sabhā" or the "Welfare League," Kumār Barendra-Kṛṣṇa, an aristocratic rogue, and his equally bad companion Bhusan followed Animī to the meeting and entered the hall to see the fun. They could not imagine that a respectable woman could speak in public and take part in themeetings. To the credit of Animī, however it

may be said, that through her companionship Barendra-kumār gradually became an honourable man, and helped Anima in her social activities.

These activities comprised the establishment of two girls' schools, one at Hugli and the other at Naihāti, and a Home for the distressed something like the Rāmkṛṣṇa Mission Home. The authoress maintains that the first duty of a woman is to serve the disabled and to help in spreading education amongst her own sex.

At first Animā gave her chief attention to the schools. She did not greatly concern herself about collecting money for their support since she herself was wealthy enough to provide such funds as were needed. But she did not get sufficient students, and could not gather even half a dozen women to form an executive committee. Her cousin Mṛṇāliṇī was the first woman to join her committee, but she had little real interest in the matter. She came of an educated family; she herself had had to go to school, and was also married to a barrister of advanced ideas. But she could never agree to the absurd idea of the equality of women with men in every sphere of life. Could not the ~~Maker~~ Creator have made woman like man, enquired Mṛṇāliṇī, if He wanted her to be

his equal? Besides it would be impossible to carry on a home if the woman did not look after it and man did not earn money for it.

With such an enter rising companion, Animā went from door to door. Everyone received them well but no one cared for their mission. When they asked Nabīn Bābu's wife to be a member of the committee, she was very much surprised. How could she go to a committee, where, she was told, their men friends and English ladies also went? Her relations would be sure to say that she had gone mad in her old age. Could she become a mem-sahib/ like Animā?

Animā also asked Nabīn Bābu's wife to send her two young daughters, one about fourteen and the other ten, to school. But the mother replied that both of them were married already. She admitted that there were families who did not object to sending married girls to school; but disreputable practices of that sort should never be allowed in her house. And the husbands of the girls, though men of good social position, would not tolerate it either.

The girl of ten expressed her intention to study music. So the mother asked Animā to come to her house every afternoon

to teach the girl. Mṛṇālinī pointed out that Animā was too busy to come every day, and asked her to make arrangements with their house to house teaching institution, under which women teachers would come and teach them reading, music and sewing. But the mother of the house would not allow those women with slippers on to come to her house. She asked Animā to come because after all she was certain that Animā belonged to the gentry. Further she did not understand the necessity of learning sewing which would make one's fingers as hard as those of the working class women.

Besides Mṛṇālinī the only committee members Animā recruited were Amalā, the widowed and educated daughter of an old Brahmo official Indra-nāth Bābu, and the young wife of a deputy magistrate, who had to join the committee because her husband wished it. Seeing no other way out of the difficulty Anima approached her friend Mrs Bingham, the wife of the district magistrate, who gave her much help. Animā realised that the connection of a magistrate's wife with the school would greatly improve its prospects, but for a long time she

was too proud to beg help in the service of her motherland from a member of the foreign ruling race.

Animā and Mṛṇālinī undertook to serve as honorary teachers in the school until regular teachers could be found. But soon they heard of two women teachers. One of them was a graduate, and the other Cārumatī, was the wife of Pandit Haranāth Bhattācārya of Barisāl. Cārumatī agreed to teach Sanskrit in the "zenānā" department. Anima was particularly pleased at this and hoped it might encourage the orthodox Hindu women to support the school. But before Cārumatī began her work, her husband came to see Anima and begged her to excuse his wife. The Hindu community, he said, felt that Animā was setting a harmful example by starting female schools, and threatened to punish Haranath if his wife took up the appointment. Though himself believing that female education was quite in accordance with the Śāstras, and personally having every sympathy with Animā's work, he was too poor to dare to go against the decision of his community.

The girls' school at Naihāti was opened with six or seven pupils, and even these did not attend regularly.

Animā arranged to distribute prizes amongst the girls. On the prize day many girls came, but from the next day most of them stopped coming as they thought there was no chance of getting any more prizes for a whole year. Anima went round and round the whole village, but all in vain. She heard the same arguments everywhere. One mother complained that her good girl had become naughty after mixing with bad girls at the school. Another said that much learning would make a girl proud. Another wondered what a woman could do with so much learning. So the Naihāti school closed its doors for lack of students, and Animā concentrated her whole energy on the school at Hugli.

In 1917 Anurupā Devī published her novel "Mahānisā" or "The Eternal Night." Here and there we find anachronisms in the book, but it professes to deal with the social condition of the first half of last century. In it we read a lot about the abuses of Kulīnism which prevailed in the Bengali community nearly a century ago.

In many cases, we are told, instead of a Kulīn husband

providing for his wife, his wife has to make provision for him. Icchāmayī was, it is true, her husband's only wife, but she had to starve to get money for his clothes, food, and especially for his drink. When she was unable to doso she used to sigh and wish she had some "satīns" to share her responsibilities.[1]

The writer tells us that t ere were many Kulīn Brāhmans and Kāyasthas, who married so many wives that it was not at all a matter of surprise if one suddenly discovered a very near relation of whose very existence he was ignorant. Many fathers and sons, and husbands and wives could not recognise one another if they met.[2]

In this same novel we read how Dhīrā urged her husband Nirmal to marry a second wife. Nirmal had married Dhīrā out of gratitude to her father, though she was blind; and he was trying to forget Aparṇā, whom he had all his life hoped to marry. But it was not only of her husband's inclination towards Aparṇā that made Dhīrā wish him to

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1. Chapter IV. - p. 32.
2. Chapter XXV. - p. 192.

marry again. She was afraid that if children were born they might be blind like herself. And believing that men married not only for love but for children too, she thought it best for him to have a second wife. To achieve her object she drowned herself in the Irāvatī.

Before her death Dhīrā had a long talk with her husband, in the course of which Nirmal says: "I presume that a man's mind is not so narrow in heaven as on the earth, so probably one could love many equally."

In the same book we see how the abuses of Kulinism were gradually being modified, and we read that when Ichchhā-mayī's son Murāridhar became a young man, he was so impressed by the pitiable condition of his mother and other Kulīn women, that he astonished all the Kulīns by his "disgraceful behaviour" in marrying only one wife and escaping from the pressure of the Kulīn system by going to live in Burmah.[1]

The writer speaks of the frequent orthodox denunciations of adult marriages. These denunciations came from all sorts of

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1. Chapter VII. p. 50.

people, especially women, who often expressed themselves vulgarly, when they talked about the unmarried grown-up girl Aparṇā.[1] But Benārī, Aparṇā's guardian, asks whether marriage was absolutely necessary for a girl even when no sutiable bridegroom was available.[2]

In the eighteenth chapter of the book the authoress refutes the allegation that Bengali women are not even touched by the sun. She tells us that in the Bengali villages they enjoy great freedom. There are hrdly any places where they cannot be met. They indulge in jokes and laughter, in swimming and singing. They have no one to reprimand or hinder them. But the writer sarcastically remarks that inspite of this freedom, there are some things which are not permitted to them. Firstly though singing is no fault, book reading is regarded as a crime. Secondly, frivolous young girls are allowed to appear unveiled before young men if they both come from the same village; while wives must be like the owls and not show their faces to their own husbands in the daytime, and even at night must not allow their conversations with their husbands to be overheard.

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1. Vide pp. 62, 206, 232, 294 and 310.
2. Chapter XXXIX. p. 318.

But though this writer is in favour of leaving women free in the villages, she dislikes women's freedom in the towns. For there is the risk of boys and girls of different nationalities mixing together, which in some cases may lead to inter-racial marriages -- to which the author strongly objects.

Saila-bālā Ghosh-jāyā.

Saila-bālā Ghosh-jāyā's "Janma-Aparādhī" was published in 1920. It is a sad story of a young wife Aparā, who suffered thrughout her life ~~fro~~ at the hands of her husband, Binodlāl. Himself a man of vicious character, he could not trust his good wife, and never allowed her to go out of the house. She never saw the Tāj-mahal though the family remained at Agra for some months. But allowed himself considerable liberty with women and used to attend dances at European clubs.

Binodlāl did not approve of the education of women. It was his belief that any woman who learnt to read and write, lost her character and became no better than a prostitute.

He regretted all his life the fact that his wife had read up to the matriculation standard before her marriage. In the same book we meet Aparṇā's niece Rāṇī, who had to beg of her little aunt to explain her husband's letter to her, as Rani herself was not educated enough to understand it properly.

Indirā Devī.

In 1920 Indirā Devī, a grand-daughter of the late Bhudeb-candra Mukherji, published a novel, "Sparśa-mani" or the "Philosopher's Stone." In this book the authoress deals with the question of child-marriage from different aspects. Vidyāratna has two grand-daughters. He arranges a marriage for the elder of the two, Annapūrṇā, at the age of seven. Annapūrṇā soon became a widow, and so Vidyāratna did not pay much attention to the problem of Umā's marriage until the time arrived when, as a Brāhman paṇḍit, he could no longer keep her unmarried against the wishes of his community.

Satīnāth, who married Umā, had had a previous love affair. He and his neighbour Kalyāṇī, who was a student of

the Bethune school, were friends, and promised to marry each other. Kalyāṇī's widowed mother, who had separated from her husband when he became a Brāhmo, approved their marriage. But when Satīnāth asked his uncle Rudra-candra's permission the latter refused it, especially because the old man did not want Satīnāth, who was to him as the apple of his eye, to give his affection to anyone save himself. He sent Satīnāth to a distant place so that in time he might forget Kalyāṇī. But Satīnāth one day suddenly came across a newspaper and read that Kalyāṇī had married an Indian Civil Servant. He thought Kalyāṇī had played him false and accepted the first proposal that came to him, and married Umā, though it transpired afterwards that the report of Kalyāṇī's marriage had been mistaken.

But Kalyāṇī, who had a sincere affection for Satīnāth, never married, and died at the early age of twenty. She may be taken as typical girl of an orthodox family who rebels against the compulsory marriage system. Sometime before Kalyāṇī's death, Vidyāratna, who was Kalyāṇī's mother's Gurudeva, raised the question of Kalyāṇī's marriage to one of his disciples.

Kalyānī's mother replied that she was betrothed to a boy, who had since married another girl, but as Kalyani still regarded him as her husband, she had determined to live the life of a Brahmacārinī; and because of this affair the mother did not like to insist on the girl marrying at all. The old Vidyāratna, who still did not know that Kalyānī's lover was his grand-daughter Umā's husband, praised Kalyānī for her sincerity. But at the same time he remarked that it was in order to avoid this kind of tragedy that Hindu reformers had abolished the Svayamvara system, and made the twelfth year the maximum marriageable age for a Hindu girl.

Umā, being born and brought up in orthodox surroundings, at first thought it rather funny for Kalyānī to express opinions about her own marriage like a European girl; and she was apparently disgusted about Kalyānī's freedom of thought and especially her defiance of the system of compulsory marriage. But when Umā came in touch with Kalyānī's nobleness of character and realised her sincere love, and her sacrifice of herself for Satīnāth, she felt differently about it. The more she realised her husband's affection for herself, the more highly she

thought of Kalyānī, and she was gladly prepared to take her as co-sharer in her husband's affections. As readers might wonder at Umā's unnatural self-sacrifice, the author assures them that even the gods cannot fathom themystery of a woman's character.

The book refers also to the polygamous marriages which took place in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rudra-kānta's father Ṣaṣṭīdās was what may be called a professional bridegroom. Whenever any girl's father was anxious to save his "Kula" or family pride by getting his daughter married, the great Kulīn Ṣaṣṭīdās was always ready to help him out of his difficulty. So long as he lived he never cared for his wives, and when he died the only thing he left them, was the observance of the Ekādaśī or fast on the eleventh day of the moon. Besides his sixty wives, who varied in age from infancy to old age, two girls were betrothed to him just before he breathed his last. But his death intervened and prevented the addition of these two to the long list of his wives, and they had to remain unmarried. Unlike his father, Rudra-kānta, who had passed many years of his life in the North West

Frontier, remained a bachelor all his life.

Both Kalyāṇī and Umā were receiving a good education before their proposals for marriage came. Kalyāṇī was preparing for the matriculation examination from the Bethune school when Satīnāth met her first. Her father taught her Bengali and Sanskrit. After his death her mother gave her an opportunity of learning English; for she understood its value as a passport to marriage for a modern Bengali girl.

Umā's grandfather Vidyāratna took special care of her education from her infancy. He never allowed her to mix with the bad girls of the village or to have anything to do with their squabbles. When she married, she had a fair knowledge of Bengali and Sanskrit, but her husband Satīnāth, absorbed in the thoughts of Kalyāṇī, did not care to find out anything about her; but supposed like many other modern scholars that a girl from a Brāhman pandit's house must be illiterate. Neglected Umā used to spend her time in painting, writing and reading, and the only person who appreciated her pictures and articles was little Sudhīr, Satīnāth's younger brother. At his suggestion she contributed an article to the "Kisalay" ot

"The Leaflet." But when it appeared her guardian Rudrakānta rebuked her severely. He addressed her as a Mem-sahib and a 'male-woman', and concluded that she must be descended from some low-caste rogue, otherwise how could she have done such an absurd thing.

Sītā and Sāntā Chatterji.

Reference must be made here to the "Tales of Bengal," published last year (1922) by the Oxford University Press. These tales are translated from the original by Sītā and Sāntā Chatterji, young sisters with modern ideas, and daughters of Rāmānanda Chatterji the Brāhmo editor of "Pravāsī." These stories deal mainly with orthodox Bengali people and the pictures of society they contain can be taken as substantially accurate.

In one of these stories we read of Animes who encouraged a young widow Nirjharinī to marry him, but when he saw that no money was forthcoming, his "affection" disappeared. Nirjharinī's father, who had himself no real objection to his daughter's re-marriage, was determined not to part either

with his money or with his social prestige.

In the "Wedding Dress," Sītā Chatterji introduces us to Kalyānī, a young widow of about eighteen, who lost the right to show her face at marriage celebrations because of her unfortunate widowhood. In another place the authoress says,- "A Hindu woman has at times to suffer in silence torments that would beat the records of hell." [1] But we gather that the time has come when the bridegroom is sometimes sent with his friends to see if he likes the bride, though the final judgment always rests with the boy's guardian and not with the boy himself. [2]

The writers in several places describe the way in which the pardā system works in modern Bengali society. When the women-folk came in crowds to see Prabodh's newly-married wife, the elder brother "in order to show sufficient respect for the pardāh of the lady visitors, had to spend the greater part of the day in the street." [3]

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1. p. 105.
2. p. 72.
3. p. 85.
4. p. 38.

If pardā women want to walk in a garden, they must go in the early dawn; for says Bidyut's sister-in-law, "do you think the men would leave the garden in the daytime for your good pleasure and go and sit out in the fields?" [1]

The "ghomṭā" is more strictly observed by the daughters-in-law than by the daughters of the house. [2] We also get some idea of the conditions under which pardī-nāśins attend theatres, cinemas or musical entertainments. At the back of the hall behind the seats of the male audience curtains are hung, behind which the ladies take their seats. [3] When Suramā hears the postman coming, she hurriedly draws her "ghomṭā" "over her loosened hair, and puts out her hand from behind the door" to take the letter, as she cannot allow herself to be seen by the postman. [4]

Bidyut talks to her grandchild about her modern ways and her attendance at the "Mem-sāhib's school," and tells

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1. p. 96.
2. p. 98.
3. p. 101.
4. p. 38.

her that a great agitation about the education of women was going on even when she herself was still a child. Her father had modern theories and ideas. But he was so afraid of his own conservative father that he did not dare to send his daughter to school. So he himself began to teach Bidyut and her two sisters-in-law. One of the reasons why her sisters-in-law did not make much progress with their studies, was that they were already married, But Bidyut's guardians did not marry her very early and so she got the opportunity of a fairly good education.[1]

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1. pp. 92-93.